

Dirk Rohmann

Christianity, Book-Burning and Censorship in Late Antiquity

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Preface

I have been interested in the impact of Christianity on the transmission of ancient texts ever since I studied classical literature and history. During my graduate studies in Tübingen, I became interested in Christian authors and religious studies. Discussions and several readers have helped to enhance this book. I am aware that a project like this will always leave some questions unresolved, and the specialist reader may find that I have not included in the final version every possible study pertinent to each aspect of this book.

I am grateful to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for a generous research grant that allowed me to do research for this book at the University of Colorado at Boulder and later at the University of Bonn. I would like to thank Noel Lenski, who made my stay in Boulder convenient and productive. I have been able to discuss this work with various scholars, of whom I would like to mention James Corke-Webster, Aaron Jackson, Melissa Markauskas, Hannah Probert, Konrad Vössing and Jamie Wood, and to present preliminary results internationally at various workshops and conferences.

Dirk Rohmann

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Introduction

The modern book has its roots in Late Antiquity. In the ancient world texts were normally written on rolls, which were made predominantly out of papyrus. Comparatively, the codex-book embodies a form much closer to today's books. Codices were bound books that allow the opening of two pages at a time. While paper as we know it was unknown in Antiquity, ancient codices were mostly made out of parchment. Parchment codices became the predominant form of books from Late Antiquity (c. 300 – 700) to the Middle Ages. Both forms were used to present and preserve information, but the durability of the materials used required them to be copied, leading to accidental and deliberate redactions, misinterpretations and mistakes. Because of their literal, symbolic and cultural power, and because they were often used to transmit religious doctrine, magic and arcane rites and narratives, and cultural information, books in this period were emblematic sites of contention between competing ideologies and cultural discourses. In this context, books could get lost, they could be censored and banned, and they could also be burnt or destroyed.

As a cultural practice, book-burning was known and performed throughout Antiquity. While other methods of destruction did exist, such as by throwing in water, book-burning was the most effective method of obliterating the writing that the book contained. It also served the purpose of ritualized purification when applied to books containing content classed as dangerous or seditious. This book considers and examines book-burning and censorship of books in Late Antiquity, arguing that the demonisation of books contrary to the Christian world view had a negative impact on the transmission of texts between Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

The assumption that book-burning was seen as a means of purification needs some clarification. Christianity had its own concepts of purification. The Bible, particularly the New Testament, is full of images emphasising the purifying force of fire; God and the faith are portrayed as fire, destroying the enemies of faith and testing the true faith as if fire tests gold and silver, and the fear of hellfire justifies any loss or drastic measure in this world.¹ The Christian author Origen gives a very interesting testimonial on the Christian idea of faith as a fire verifying any human interpretation on the true understanding of faith. Comment-

¹ 1Cor. 3:13 – 20; 1Pet. 1:7; Ps. 68:2; Mark 9:43 – 5; Matt. 18:8; Apoc. 21:8. Abbreviations of ancient authorities are based on Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* and Liddell–Scott–Jones's *Greek–English Lexicon*. All translations are my own. Translations of biblical texts are modernised from the King James Version.

ing on the biblical Book of Numbers, Origen explains the role of heretics² within God's creation, suggesting, as other Christian authors do, that the fire of biblical truth is not only able to refute heretics, but does also shine brighter if elucidated by false, heretical interpretations. While this is a somewhat metaphorical picture, Origen does mention at least one heretical author (Marcion) whose works were actually ordered to be burnt.³ This shows that the idea of true faith burning and purifying false interpretations was close to the actual act of refuting and literally destroying heretical works, while the act of refutation itself helped to shape orthodoxy. In other words, there is no need for the refuted material to survive.

This spiritual value of ancient writings stands alongside their material worth. In Late Antiquity expensive codex-books became the norm, but ancient papyri-books were probably much cheaper, given the availability of the material as papyrus was a plant that grew abundantly in Egypt. In classical Athens, books written by the philosopher Anaxagoras were reportedly sold for the market-price of one drachma, perhaps comparable to the daily wage of a skilled worker.⁴ According to the Edict on Maximum Prices in 301, in Late Antiquity scribes were paid much more than that to produce books, but the currency had long been devaluated. It is therefore difficult to compare book-prices. At any rate, book prices greatly differed depending on the quality and age of the book.⁵ There is a general tendency that codex-books in Late Antiquity became more lavish and expensive, especially Christian books. Moreover, although it is hardly possible to give exact figures, there was also a relatively high degree of literacy in ancient societies. Inscriptions had a central place in many ancient cities. On the other hand, just like

2 The term heretic is usually used today to refer to Christians whose opinions disagreed with what was regarded as the authoritative interpretation of Christianity at a given time period, defined by councils or Christian authors that were themselves regarded as authoritative. This is a subjective category as heretics regarded their opinions as the true way and those of the others as erroneous.

3 Orig. *hom. 9 in Num.* 1 (GCS 30, Orig. 7:54–5): *ubi enim vera fides est et integra verbi Dei praedicatio, aut argentea dicuntur aut aurea, ut fulgor auri declaret fidei puritatem et argentum igni probatum eloquia examinata significet. ... ista ergo batilla aerea, id est haereticorum voces si adhibeamus ad altare Dei, ubi divinus ignis est, ubi vera fidei praedicatio, melius ipsa veritas ex falsorum comparatione fulgebit. si enim, ut verbi gratia dicam, ponam dicta Marcionis aut Basilidis aut alterius cuiuslibet haeretici et haec sermonibus veritatis ac scripturarum divinarum testimoniis velut divini altaris igne confutem, nonne evidentior eorum ex ipsa comparatione apparebit impietas?* (The use of u/v in the Latin and of upper/lower case in sentence openings and proper names has been adapted for consistency throughout).

4 Pl. *ap.* 26d.

5 An example for cheap old books is Gell. 9.4. Other examples, Blanck (1992), 124–9.

in today's world, books were sometimes recycled. Thus, the first-century poet Martial advises a colleague to donate his books to fish-sellers.⁶ This is somewhat ironic, but shows that papyrus was used as wrapping material. Many texts written on papyrus have been discovered in tombs, used, for example, as wrappings for mummies or sacred crocodiles. The spiritual nature of these texts therefore surpassed the value of the writing material. It is also known from Oxyrhynchus that biblical books were binned regardless of doctrinal concerns.⁷ It is conceivable that, when a limited number of books were burnt, their material value was somewhat negligible. On the other hand, many classical authors had a high regard for the cultural value of books and therefore despised their destruction.⁸ It is also known from the *Life of Severus* (discussed in section 3.4) that one owner of magic books paid an unspecified, but reportedly high price to acquire these. The burning of magic books may well have included a certain amount of social envy as the individuals who burnt these books would often have been unable to afford books at this price.

Censorship may be defined as the suppression of texts (entire books or single passages) as objectionable, often on ideological (including religious) grounds, applied through an authoritative agent. Censorship can be applied, for example, through legislation to curb the circulation of any writings, the wider ramifications of this being the active refusal to copy texts. Because of its association with totalitarian states in the twentieth century (most notably the Nazi book-burning of 1933) and because of a variety of fictional works, contemporary readers often have an emotive response to the idea and practice of book-burning and censorship. Yet, the concept of censorship was already known to Plato,⁹ and it was endorsed by later Christian authorities. The institutional possibilities within which censorship could be enforced in Antiquity were very different from modern states, as many books were privately copied and distributed. Censorship in pre-modern societies has therefore been linked to canon formation.¹⁰ It is also worth noting that in Antiquity there was no constitutional or general law defining freedom of speech. While the concept of liberty of speech (*libertas dicendi*) did exist, it did so more as a privilege of the elite rather than as an accepted legal and cultural human right. Thus when books were burnt in Late Antiquity it would be inaccurate to consider this (as we would in contemporary

⁶ Mart. 3.50. On similar examples, Speyer (1981), 99.

⁷ Luijendijk (2010).

⁸ I have treated this aspect extensively in my 2013 article.

⁹ Pl. *r.* 2.377b: 'the first thing will be to establish a censorship of the writers of fiction' (πρώτον δὲ ἡμῖν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἐπιστατητέον τοῖς μυθοποιοῖς). And see Naddaff (2002).

¹⁰ Assmann and Assmann (1987).

terms) as an individually or culturally oppressive act, although it is possible that the owners of these books may well have thought otherwise.¹¹ While book-burning and censorship are today often regarded as government-sanctioned acts, we will see a variety of different incidents. Besides public acts of book-burning, often performed by secular or ecclesiastical authorities, books could privately be burnt both in Antiquity and in our own recent past. This means that there are a variety of motives to destroy a book. Examples may include waste management; destruction of a manuscript by the author, who feels his contribution to be inadequate; voluntary destruction by the owner who dislikes the content of a book (because of its poor quality or out of ideological or religious reasons); burning a holy book to attract publicity; spontaneous acts of book-burning caused by religious or moral offence; identity-forming, ceremonial acts of vandalism, if, for example, supporters of a football club burn items related to a rival club.

I shall consider book-burning in every possible form, distinguishing between different motivations to burn books. I shall also consider censorship not so much in a modern understanding (government-sanctioned oppression of writings) as within the possibilities of an ancient state: as orders or recommendations to ban books or as active refusal to copy books. Both strands of investigation and analysis will be pursued in order to answer the question of whether or not book-burning, the banning of books, the active refusal to copy texts, and the deliberate neglect of books to promote their disintegration inspired by religious reservations affected the survival of pagan literatures, particularly those concerned with the pre-Christian philosophical tradition.

Overview of Previous Scholarship

To date, no detailed specialised study has comprehensively investigated the subject of Christian book-destruction and censorship of pagan texts at the end of Antiquity.¹² In their examinations of Christian book production, particularly

¹¹ I have discussed this in greater detail in Rohmann (2013).

¹² The term pagan refers to religious affiliation outside of Christianity and Judaism, normally aligned with Greco-Roman religions and particularly in Late Antiquity with 'oriental religions' (such as the cults of Mithras, Cybele and Isis). After Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire, unbaptised individuals could be seen as pagans, and Christian sources usually refer to pagans as Greeks, Hellenes in the East (thus Hellenism as paganism) and *ethnici*, *pagani*, *gentiles* in the West. With pagan literature I mean every form of writing authored by pagans or of pagan character (including, for example, magic, astrology and philosophy), whereas classical literature is a sub-category that comprises a canon of high-quality literature (for exam-

the origins and introduction of the codex, recent works on Christianity and text transmission have perhaps not fully appreciated the cultural-historical significance of book-burning and censorship in Late Antiquity or its ramifications for Classical Studies.¹³ While the subject of religious violence in this period has recently attracted sustained consideration both in monographs and conference proceedings, scholars of religious conflict have paid relatively little attention to the active processes of book-burning – especially when compared to the academic focus on the destruction of other pagan cultural objects.¹⁴ As a consequence, drawing on anthropological and sociological theories, a tendency has arisen to categorise book-burning in Late Antiquity as an act of religious purification ritual rather than an act of cultural violence and of censorship.¹⁵

Supporting this narrative's contention is an academic consensus across the fields of Classical Philology, Archaeology, and Early Medieval History that has noted the detrimental impact Christianity had on the uninterrupted and uncorrupted transmission of ancient texts, although it does not always position this as a consequence of active censorship or destruction. While early studies on this subject were partly informed by the outdated view of a strict pagan–Christian divide, a number of recent studies still adhere to the view that Christianity had a negative impact on text transmission.¹⁶ Indeed, the theme of zealous Christians burning pagan books, thereby destroying the legacy of Antiquity has had a place in popular and scholarly vision since Gibbon's outrage at the burning of the library of Alexandria in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (chapter 28, 1781). Similarly, in his polemical late work, *The Antichrist*, the nineteenth-century philosopher Nietzsche sought to portray the negative impact Christianity had on Roman culture. (§ 57; 59–60).

While Gibbon and Nietzsche's views were informed by the religious and cultural discourses of their time, modern scholarship has adopted more neutral views on the transformations that Christianity introduced to Late Antiquity. Stroumsa, for example, noted that the “rise of the religions of the book” was an important aspect of Late Antiquity, when various co-existing religions increas-

ple, the works of Cicero or Plato). Instructive overview of terms used by Christian authors of Antiquity with regard to pagans and pagan authors: Kahlos (2007), 18–28. And see Bowersock (1990); Alan Cameron (2011), 14–25.

¹³ Grafton and Williams (2006); Williams (2006); Klingshirn and Safran (2007).

¹⁴ Hahn (2004); Gaddis (2005); contributions in Drake (2006), Hahn et al. (2008), Hahn (2011).

¹⁵ Sarefield (2006); Sarefield (2007); Averil Cameron (2007); Herrin (2009).

¹⁶ Norden (1910), 554–5; Erbse (1961), 242; Rüdiger (1961), 513; Wilson ([1967] 1980), 337; Prinz (2000), 513; de Faveri (2003), 713; Klopsch (2003), 725; Mojsov (2010) specifically on Alexandria. Recent book on book-burning in the Middle Ages: Werner (2007).

ingly came to focus on texts of authority, and that these changes lead to hardening of attitudes against other persuasions.¹⁷ The Judaeo-Christian tradition is an obvious example for this transformation, but so too are Islam and Manichaeism. It has also been noted that monotheistic ideas can as well be traced to the relevant pagan religious and philosophical groups of Late Antiquity.¹⁸ To my mind, there was still a difference in the attitudes towards the written word that came with Christianity. The Bible was divinely revealed. The establishment of a correct text and of a certain canon of books was thus something other than simply philological accuracy. It was about knowledge of things divine. This intensified the magical perception of written texts in Antiquity, discussed above. This change can also be seen in the sacrosanct nature of texts. While there have always been sacred texts in classical cultures, such as the Sibylline oracles, mystery religions and the teachings of Pythagoras, which were kept secret, some Christian texts contained colophons, written warnings against any alteration of the text.¹⁹

Moreover, it is generally accepted that by the fourth century Christian authors tended to advocate a religiously neutral reading of the classics. While Stroumsa acknowledged that leading Christian authors advocated censorship of heretical ideas, one of the questions addressed in this book is whether heresy was aligned only with specifically Christian non-conformism or also with pagan traditions.²⁰

In this context, Speyer's German language *Book-Destruction and Censorship of the Spirit by Pagans, Jews and Christians* and Sarefield's *Burning Knowledge: Studies of Book-burning in Ancient Rome* are both much broader in terms of their time period and the identities of people involved in these practices. Both Speyer and Sarefield dedicated only a few pages on the subject of book-burning and censorship of texts originating from pagan traditions in Late Antiquity, emphasizing the need for further research into this question.²¹

Speyer's study broke up the losses caused by censorship and destruction into different categories. On one hand, he concluded that the loss of heretical

¹⁷ Stroumsa (2009), 30–41, 95–109.

¹⁸ See Athanassiadi and Frede (1999).

¹⁹ For example, Apoc. 22:18: "If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll." (ἐάν τις ἐπιθῇ ἐπ' αὐτά, ἐπιθήσει ἐπ' αὐτὸν ὁ θεὸς τὰς πληγὰς τὰς γεγραμμένας ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ) Further examples, Speyer (1981), 25–30.

²⁰ Stroumsa (2009), 50–55, 95.

²¹ Speyer (1981), 130–37; Sarefield (2006). Early general studies on book-burning in Antiquity, with no special interest in Late Antiquity: Forbes (1936); Cramer (1945) and Speyer's preliminary study (1970).

texts was a consequence of suppression and deliberate destruction, noting the ways that clerical and imperial authorities outlawed heretical books. As a consequence, he suggested that such texts survived only when orthodox authors quoted fragments for refutation, when copyists forged the author's name and attributed the work to a popular orthodox author, or when these texts were translated and transmitted in the Islamic world. On the other hand, he also contends that only "a very small part" of pagan literature was destroyed by Christians, a conclusion based on the paucity of evidence indicating the exact titles or figures of books destroyed.²² However, the balance of probability and evidence indicates that Speyer is right when he suggests that it is difficult to estimate what was materially lost to book-burning and censorship. While he categorised targeted pagan texts into magical literature, anti-Christian writings, ritual books and lascivious literature, Speyer began with a statement that merits further discussion:

From pagan scientific books, in which the old religion was defended, Christianity attacked, there are only weak remainders extant or evidence that such works have once existed. This is largely the fault of ecclesiastical censorship of books, supported by edicts of Christian emperors. (Speyer, 1981, 134)

Speyer defines these writings as an anti-Christian speech by the rhetorician Fronto, a pamphlet by Hierocles, and the treatises of the philosophers Celsus and Porphyry and the emperor Julian. Yet the rate of survival is no more fruitful with regard to other writings. Where magical papyri have turned up since the nineteenth century, they have been chance finds and many philosophical texts, notably those of the pre-Socratics, have not survived at all except in refutations by Christian authors.²³

Before concluding answers can be given on the impact Christianity had on the dissemination of pagan books, it is therefore necessary to briefly outline the trajectory of the transmission of pagan literature in general. It is clear that various factors have affected the transmission of texts, as we shall see in the following section. Among these, the social, cultural, and religious rise of Christianity should be considered influential as a detrimental or limiting force – both as an active agent in the destruction of books and a limiting factor via their neglect.

²² Speyer (1981), 180–84 (quotation at 184).

²³ On an overview of genres edited as the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* by Preisendanz, see Brashear (1992), 39 and also 29.

Text Transmission in Antiquity

Most of the literary works of Antiquity are lost. For example, it is estimated that for Latin literature less than one per cent of titles survive in total.²⁴ The ratio of extant titles to titles lost but known from secondary references is less than 10 per cent for both the Greek and Latin literature.²⁵ However, we are unaware of much of ancient literature's corpus simply because then-contemporary authors tended not to cite or mention the sources they used. An exception to this is Pliny the Elder who claims to have studied 2,000 books to write his *Natural History*.²⁶ On the other hand, much of high quality literature, but significantly more Greek than Latin literature has survived: the Attic orators, for example, including all of Demosthenes and pseudo-Demosthenian texts, and works from the fourth-century pagan rhetorician Libanius have all come down to us.

Apart from quotations of ancient literature, the evidence on the amount of literary titles extant at a given period within Antiquity is scant. Many written texts were not meant to survive for centuries, but only to circulate among a limited readership. In this age, books were found in the public libraries of prestigious cities, institutions affiliated with gymnasia, and private collections. If a book did not find a readership, then the chances were that it would not be copied. Given the perishable nature of the materials that texts were copied onto, this meant that it would not survive. By extension, texts that gained a wider audience were more likely to survive. For example, in his famous tenth book of *Institutio Oratoria* Quintilian gave a history of famous Latin literature in comparison with Greek literature, used in schools and circulating widely. Quintilian was the first publicly appointed professor of rhetoric in Rome in the first century and his book outlines the rhetorical processes aimed at canonisation. As the grammarian Terentianus Maurus wrote in the second century "according to the capabilities of the reader, books have their destinies."²⁷

One of the key reasons cited as to why many of these books have not come down to us from Antiquity is the break-up of the Western Roman Empire. Up to the mid-twentieth century, the notion of a cultural decline in Late Antiquity prevailed. The works of Brown influentially proposed the view that Late Antiquity experienced broad cultural changes, which can best be understood as transformation processes, and needs therefore to be seen as a society in its own right.²⁸

²⁴ Fuhrmann (2005), 17.

²⁵ Gerstinger (1948); Bardon (1952/56); von Albrecht (1994) gives a survey of Latin literature.

²⁶ Plin. *nat. pr.* 17.

²⁷ Ter. Maur. 1286: *pro captu lectoris habent sua fata libelli*.

²⁸ Brown (1971b); Brown (2003).

As a result, Late Antiquity is today often regarded as a period of cultural recovery after the so-called third-century crisis, although the view that there was no cultural decline in Late Antiquity is itself now fading.²⁹ Fuhrmann explained the loss of Latin literature as a result of the third-century crisis, noting the difficulties in attributing titles with certainty in the period 235–284.³⁰ Similarly, Herzog and Schmidt posited that change of literary taste during the Second Sophistic narrowed down the corpus of ancient texts before the fourth century.³¹

The evidence is scant, but it is possible to suggest that while the production of literature declined during the third century this may not necessarily have affected the transmission of texts from earlier centuries, at least as far as Greek literature is concerned. For example, Longinus, a Platonic philosopher of the third century AD and teacher of the famous philosopher Porphyry, wrote that Greek philosophers of various schools studied both ancient and recent authors.³² Similarly, quoting an anonymous treaty, the Church historian Eusebius attests the transmission of ancient scientific knowledge in the early fourth century by non-conformist Christian followers of Artemon.³³ Oribasius compiled a medical handbook on behalf of the emperor Julian (361–363). Although favouring Galen, he was able to draw from many medical authors still extant at that time,³⁴ but he may have had access to a special medical library. This evidence can be aligned with Witschel's convincing qualification of the impact of the third-century crisis on the urban culture in a detailed study.³⁵ While it is true that more ancient texts today are extant from the fourth century than from any other century of Antiquity, this state of transmission is due as much to the prolific Christian authors and obvious interest by the Christian authorities

²⁹ See recently Ward-Perkins (2005).

³⁰ Fuhrmann (2005), 509–11. Cf. Averil Cameron (1993), 14; Alan Cameron (2011), 400–403.

³¹ Herzog and Schmidt (1989), 16–17.

³² Quoted in Porph. *Plot.* 3.24–36.

³³ Eus. *h.e.* 5.28.14: “They give up the sacred scriptures of God, and practise geometry – earth-measurement – as they are of the earth and speak of the earth, and do not know him who comes from above (John 3:31). Euclidian geometry is practised by some of them, Aristotle and Theophrastus are admired; Galen is perhaps even worshipped by some.” (καταλιπόντες δὲ τὰς ἀγίας τοῦ θεοῦ γραφάς, γεωμετρίαν ἐπιτηδεύουσιν, ὡς ἂν ἐκ τῆς γῆς ὄντες καὶ ἐκ τῆς γῆς λαλοῦντες καὶ τὸν ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενον ἀγνοοῦντες. Εὐκλείδης γοῦν παρά τισιν αὐτῶν φιλοπόνως γεωμετρεῖται, Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ καὶ Θεόφραστος θαυμάζονται· Γαληνὸς γὰρ ἴσως ὑπὸ τινων καὶ προσκυνεῖται.) 5.28.16 suggests such copies were circulating.

³⁴ Orib. *coll. med.* 1 pr. 2–3.

³⁵ Witschel (1999).

in transmitting books during the Middle Ages rather than the actual comparative productivity of the fourth century.

Based on earlier studies, Alan Cameron argued that Latin Christian authors of the fourth and fifth centuries roughly read the same (Latin and few Greek) classical authors as their pagan contemporaries did, and that these classical authors are largely identical with the ones read today.³⁶ The argument of this book is that, while Christian ecclesiastical authors often criticised any kind of pagan literature (but with doubtful effect), there was a broad consensus that certain old branches of pagan philosophy were incommensurable with, and presented a challenge to, Christian doctrine.

Factors Affecting the Transmission of Texts

As I have intimated, the survival of ancient books, texts, and writings often depends on circumstances or a series of coincidences. A key factor in this is the willingness to copy texts. Most of the texts that have failed to come down to us through time perish because of a lack of interest in them or a change in cultural taste or beliefs. For example, early imperial histories (such as the history by Cluvius Rufus) were generally not available by the fourth century, Tacitus excepted. Likewise, while the Hellenistic poet Callimachus lost popularity in the Byzantine age, Apollonius of Rhodes continued to be read. In this section, I shall therefore enumerate a number of factors that affected the transmission of texts from Antiquity to the Middle Ages.

A significant proportion of scholars identify the eventual transcription from papyrus roll to parchment codex in the late fourth and early fifth century as the prime reason for the loss of pagan texts.³⁷ Texts not transcribed were excluded from further transmission. It is not known whether or not the costs of production contributed to the media change. The material of parchment was in use occasionally since the second century BC at the latest. Martial in the late first century AD mentions early parchment codices in casual use for what appear to be pocket books for reading the classics.³⁸ The increasing preference for parchment is linked to Christianisation. Based primarily on an early survey of books discov-

³⁶ Alan Cameron (2011), 399–420, 529–46. Earlier study on quotations in Lactantius (early fourth century), Ogilvie (1978). However, there is also evidence to suggest that the pagan senator Symmachus had access to works by Livy and Pliny the Elder now lost: Symm. *ep.* 4.18.5–6.
³⁷ Gemeinhardt (2007), 43; Lapidge (2006), 131; von Albrecht (1994), 1383; Speyer (1981), 24.

³⁸ Mart. 14.3–7.

ered in the ancient rubbish bin in Oxyrhynchus from the first to seventh century, Kenyon concluded the material was used mostly for Christian texts.³⁹ Roberts and Skeat came up with the hypothesis that Christian congregations promoted the preference for the parchment codex first in Antioch or Rome – although contemporary scholarship considers this model to be simplistic.⁴⁰ However, from a different angle, Cavallo's sociological theory of a widespread hostility against the roll as the carrier of the elite rhetorical tradition confirms the archaeological evidence.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the process of replacing old books with new parchments can be accurately documented only for the theological library of Caesarea in the third and fourth centuries and for the imperial library of Constantinople.⁴² While this process was underway during the period under discussion, it is worth noting that worshippers of the Nile-river cult in Egypt continued to use papyri as late as the eighth century.⁴³ But by comparison to papyrus, parchment codices could keep more content and allowed for easier cross-referencing – all of which were of interest to Christian Bible exegesis and to the law.

Papyrus was available in abundance in the ancient world, indicating that books were produced on a relatively large scale. Papyri rolls, up to 11 m long, were produced primarily in Egypt. Besides supplying the Mediterranean with writing material, papyrus served different purposes. Estimations are that in the Hellenistic and Roman period production of papyrus amounted “beyond doubt, to millions of rolls per annum.”⁴⁴ In the early second century, Pliny the Younger, famous author of a letter collection, indicates that a private biography of an otherwise unknown person, who had died in his youth, had a circulation of 1,000 copies, but Pliny here is criticising this effort as inadequate. Nevertheless, this suggests that outwith of its administrative, legal, or governmental uses, papyrus was much used privately for documentation up to and including personal biographies.⁴⁵

Although some scholars continue to sustain “the myth that papyrus is not a durable material”,⁴⁶ papyrologists have come to the conclusion that papyrus is,

³⁹ Kenyon (1951), 96–8, 111–12.

⁴⁰ Roberts and Skeat (1983), 54–61.

⁴¹ Cavallo (1975).

⁴² Grafton and Williams (2006); Alan Cameron (2011), 426. On the contents of the library in Caesarea, according to Eusebius (who made extensive use of it), Carriker (2003), esp. 299. It was smaller than it was claimed.

⁴³ See Trombley (1985), 346.

⁴⁴ Lewis (1989), 102. And see Blanck (1992) on books and book-trade in Antiquity.

⁴⁵ Plin. *ep.* 4.7.2.

⁴⁶ Roberts and Skeat (1983), 7.

in fact, an astonishingly durable, transportable and flexible material, one which has “a usable life of hundreds of years.”⁴⁷ Ancient literary papyri have survived only as archaeological finds discovered since the late nineteenth century, in places such as the desert sand, graves, rubbish bins and places buried under volcanic ashes (like the philosophical library in Herculaneum), provided favourable conditions were given. It is a commonplace that no book transferred from roll to codex was likely to survive except in special circumstances because rolls that were not kept safe in sturdy boxes were much more vulnerable than the parchment codex. Rolls could more easily tear if used or rot if opened. However, no papyri containing pagan texts are firmly known to have been stored in any medieval library. The numerous Ravenna papyri, which survived in an archive, are church documents from 445 to 700.⁴⁸ The two oldest literary papyri preserved in libraries too have Christian texts: 92 and 103 folios (double sided pages) both from the sixth century (the latter wrapped in strips of a book authored by Pliny).⁴⁹ With the abolition of trade routes after the fall of the Roman Empire, papyrus was seldom used in the West. This shows that there was some chance that papyri could have been transmitted at least into the Middle Ages, if stored appropriately, and that appropriate storage of papyri was linked to Christian interests.

Alongside changing tastes, cultural shifts, and technological developments, military invasions and the economic decline also contributed to the loss of texts in Late Antiquity. Ancient libraries could also easily fall victim to natural disasters.⁵⁰ Calculations suggest that the losses of Greek manuscripts in the twentieth century amounted to around five per cent, with World Wars One and Two being significant in this context.⁵¹ The Byzantine (553) and Lombard (568) invasions in Italy seem to coincide with the end of senatorial subscriptions and the eventual abolition of the senatorial order as well as of the grammarians’ teaching profession (an end welcomed by Pope Gregory the Great). In the early seventh century Sassanians and later Arabs took important regions such as Egypt and Syria, reducing the Byzantine Empire roughly to Asia Minor and Constantinople.⁵² Therefore, what might be called regime change and other con-

⁴⁷ Lewis (1989), 57–61, at 60.

⁴⁸ Edited by Tjäder (1954–82). Lapidge (2006), 94 gives an overview of papyri surviving in the West.

⁴⁹ *CLA* 304: translation of Flavius Josephus, considered the autograph of Rufinus, *CLA* 1507: Hilarius, wrapped in *CLA* 1470.

⁵⁰ See Heather (2005); Ward-Perkins (2005).

⁵¹ Since 1891: Richard (1980), 3–4.

⁵² See Haldon (1997); Kaegi (1992); Kennedy (2007).

flict types must have had a correlative impact on textual preservation and survival. Brown, for example, identified economic reasons and changing educational requirements alongside religious reservations as key factors in the decline of classical studies.⁵³ This means that when earthly success and social status no longer depended on familiarity with non-Christian texts, this inevitably led to a loss of interest in these texts.

In the first part of this investigation, I shall survey the evidence for book-destruction and censorship of books in Late Antiquity (c. 300–700), discussing the credibility of the sources and setting out the uncertainty of the evidence. Building on previous literature on book-burning and censorship in Antiquity, I will consider a broad range of relevant sources from Late Antiquity, particularly pagan and Christian correspondence, history, hagiography, poetry, legal and apologetic-polemical texts, placing particular emphasis on the period after the emperor Constantine. My aim is not to provide a complete account of instances of book-burning and bans. While I will discuss the significant relevant instances of book-burning and legal bans on pagan books or texts, I am aware that there are some further (less important or late) testimonials of Christians burning Christian books that I have not included here.⁵⁴

The material is arranged according to the various kinds of book-destruction: by the Roman authorities in accordance with law (chapters 1–2); by zealous Christians, such as monks, ascetics and holy men (Chapter 3); by individuals renouncing their past (section 3.6) and by incidental or deliberate damage in raids and riots (Chapter 6). It is ordered thus to support my contention that while most of the evidence shows that books containing magic, astrology, heresy and specific philosophical attacks against Christianity were destroyed, there was also a grey area of books vulnerable to destruction and the categories of banned and burnt books was not clear-cut. It is also ordered thus to distinguish between different motives for book-burning, especially between public and private acts.

The aim and objectives of this book are to examine the practice of book-burning in Late Antiquity, positioning the phenomenon as a ritual practice and also a potential means for curbing the circulation of literature that was perceived to be dangerous. In undertaking this endeavour, the book will present and discuss evidence for bans and censorship of works as well as examining how censorship was implemented. Finally, it will survey the polemical discourse sur-

⁵³ Brown (2003), 233–7.

⁵⁴ See Mazza (2007), 449; Luijendijk (2010), 241–2. On the Byzantine Empire, Averil Cameron (2007), 10–17. Burning of Christian books in the fifth-century Vandal Empire in North Africa: *Vict. Vit. hist. pers.* 3.10 (CSEL 7:76): *deinde codices universos sacerdotum, quos persequabantur, praeceperant ignibus tradi*. During the iconoclastic period: Theoph. AM 6263.

rounding influential late antique authors, determining the personal and ideological attitudes that informed period decisions regarding which books to copy or not to copy. Indicating the complexities surrounding such a discussion of period, texts and authors, I shall focus on authors from the post-Constantinian period, a time when Christianity became increasingly and recognizably culturally dominant, but I shall also trace the origins of these censorious attitudes back to earlier Christian authors. This acknowledges that their engagements with competing literatures and ideologies built on established cultural precedents, if not necessarily legislative or authoritative ones.

It is apparent that these Christian authors were highly educated in much of the material they criticise or condemn. Of course, this does not mean that they were automatically hostile towards these cultures and their literatures. By comparison with the virulence of their attacks on heretical literature, their engagements with pagan and classical literatures appear somewhat benign. I shall argue that this is because these Christian authors perceived their refutations as dealing with enemies still influential. They also criticised the attitudes of contemporary Christians whom they thought were too lax. The guiding thrust of chapters 4–5, therefore, will determine in which areas the condemnation is more serious because pagan (philosophical) literature, or opinions transmitted in literature, are linked to heresy, magic, serious deviation from the Christian world view, canonicity and doctrinal issues. This book therefore also deals with the suppression of thoughts and ideas. Examining this, I shall also point to evidence where the language used by Christian authors to refute philosophical opinions is close to censorship laws and even incidents of book-burning in literary sources. In keeping with the points made by this section, I will also outline the strategies that were used to appropriate pagan literature for the Christian cause. Many of the passages I will analyse have yet to be discussed so far in this context.

It is important to stress that treatises and sermons (not unlike in today's world) tell us little about the actual attitudes of the majority of the population and that incendiary language has had a long standing in polemical texts by different philosophical or religious schools since Antiquity (for example, in the essays by Lucian). These reservations should be taken into account throughout the discussions of the following chapters. This book does not subscribe to the outdated view that there was a strong Christian–pagan divide, with regard to culture, social networks or violent conflicts. Many modern scholars have also been keen to stress that Christian sources overemphasise the conflict between Christians and pagans, but that in reality there was neither public interest nor institutional possibilities to violently coerce pagans on a large scale in the fourth

and fifth centuries.⁵⁵ Keeping in mind this ambiguity, I will examine whether or not there is a way to determine in which literary genres the condemnation is simply rhetoric and in which the condemnation may have provoked action of one form or another. I will investigate whether there are pagan literary genres which are linked broadly to the fields of magic, divination and heresy and why. I will assess which sources these authors themselves were drawing on when they polemicized against less well-preserved texts and ideas. This discourse on which literary genres belong to Jerusalem and which to Babylon, figuratively speaking, helps us better to understand the range of genres that were unlikely to be copied and preserved. I shall argue that the similarity of terminology used by Christian authors and by censorship legislation played a role in some texts surviving and others being lost. In this context, the opinions of a few Christian authors (however powerful some of them were) tell us little about what officials actually did with regard to book-burning, but the Christian polemical discourse opens a window into the monastic world of Late Antiquity. Within this milieu polemical and hagiographical discourses on pagan philosophy often seem to be related. John Chrysostom, for example, was himself very close to the ascetic-monastic environment in which hagiographical writings often originated and circulated. Not only did monasteries become the transmitters of the ancient literary patrimony but also monks and ascetics were often involved in the search for, and destruction of, subversive books.

Whilst it is obvious that the evidence for book-burning is often linked to religious conflict, the book does not subscribe to the traditional conflict model. As a consequence, it must be noted that while religious conflicts demonstrably occurred, the Christianisation of the Roman Empire was much more peaceful and consensual than this selection of evidence implies at first glance. The first part of this book shows that actions against magical and astrological books were usually aligned with charges of paganism, even if the owner of these books purported to be Christians. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there was a strong pagan-Christian divide or general Christian hostility against the classics or against education throughout Late Antiquity. It must be noted that while the sources often use clear-cut categories regarding religious affiliation, in reality we have to expect a nuanced picture: baptised and unbaptised individuals; individuals with weak or strong religious beliefs, and so on.

We have seen that two of the dominant cultural trends of Late Antiquity are the emergence of Christianity as the state religion and the transcription of an-

55 Averil Cameron (1991), 7; 15–46; Brown (1992), 128–9; Brown (1995), 29–54; Caseau (2004), 120; Kahlos (2007); and Ward-Perkins (2011) on archaeological evidence.

cient texts from papyrus to parchment, a process that can be linked to Christianisation. The history of text transmission is somewhat diffuse and obscure. Notwithstanding this, it must be noted that as a result of this process texts that were not copied on parchment were not preserved into the Middle Ages. Introducing and discussing the evidence for Christians destroying or banning Christian books, this book indicates that there is scholarly agreement that texts that were unanimously regarded as heretical in censorship legislation usually did not survive except in refutations, because these were either destroyed or deliberately refused to be copied.

From the discussion of chapters 1–3 we can conclude that while books are known to have been destroyed ever since books existed, book-burning in Late Antiquity for the first time affected a significant part of the population. The contents of destroyed books are generally unclear and mostly unspecified in the sources, with “magical” books being the predominant category. The emperor Diocletian ordered Christian books to be burnt. Christian authors blamed pagan philosophers for this, penning some retaliatory narratives in the decades to follow. Destruction of books was also carried out for other reasons. Under the Christian emperor Valens, for example, Roman state authorities searched out and destroyed books on magic, law and liberal arts, in reaction to a conspiracy against the emperor. As a consequence, owners burnt their whole libraries throughout the East. It is likely that philosophical books were destroyed on this occasion because both Ammianus and later sources report that contemporary philosophers were particularly affected.

Under Constantine and the Theodosian dynasty, laws were repeatedly promulgated against a range of heretical and astrological books, although the search specifics were somewhat vague. While there is some evidence that books were occasionally destroyed, it is difficult to say whether or not these laws were effective. A law of 409 required *mathematici* to burn their books or be expelled. There is evidence in one of Augustine’s sermon (and possibly in Prudentius) that this law was enforced, at least in the area of North Africa with which Augustine’s audience was familiar. The commonest meaning of *mathematici* in expulsion contexts is that of astrologer; however, various sources indicate that there was a grey area in the interpretation of this term, and some Christian authors used it polemically with regard to Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. Certainly, there were no Stoic and Epicurean philosophers by this time, but it is possible that books containing these philosophical traditions were vulnerable to destruction. There is scant evidence that libraries were possibly destroyed during religious conflicts, most famously when the Serapeum was sacked in Alexandria in 391.

Particularly in hagiographical sources, there is also evidence for zealous Christians (monks, ascetics, holy men and Christian medical practitioners), often supported by state authorities, sporadically burning pagan and heretical books from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages. The reliability of these accounts, however, is often questionable. In these reported cases of book-burning, magic books again predominate as these books were believed to be powerful. The sources sometimes put magic books on a par with an unspecific range of pagan books without distinction. Nevertheless, as evidenced in the *Life of Porphyry* (section 3.5) it is clear that pagan ritual books were destroyed. Although mystery religions tended to transmit their doctrines orally, papyri on the religions of Mithras and other gods have been discovered buried in tombs. In legendary conversion accounts, magic books destined for burning are, in fact, portrayed as books on pagan philosophy. In the few passages of the *Life of Severus* which describe the content of magic books, these books do not simply contain magical spells, but were instead literary texts related to astrology, pagan religion or invocations to gods. In the case of Shenoute (who authored polemical treatises against philosophers) magic texts stand alongside whole book stacks owned by pagans and hieroglyphic inscriptions in contexts of destruction.

Section 3.4 illustrates the ways in which searches for these books were organised. Local judges, *defensores*, and civic officials were legally given the power to act as a religious police force. Tortures and other means of coercion, including the implicit threat of execution, could be applied to extract information as to which people were keeping problematic books. Given the practical difficulties of locating copies of a banned book, denunciation was the most feasible way to identify prohibited books, but denunciation was often due to reasons such as personal hatred rather than religious purification or social control. There is also some evidence that scribes reported to Church authorities suspicious pagan contents of books they received, with severe consequences to the owners of these books. Book-burning sometimes was a voluntary act (for example, to foster one's own future clerical career), but it could also involve coercion, as shown in the example of a sermon by Augustine, in section 2.3.

According to a hagiographical text, the historical setting of which is supported by other sources, Epicurean and other texts in the possession of pagans were searched out under torture in Antioch and in the East during the reign of Justinian, probably in 555. However, it is unlikely that original Epicurean treatises circulated at this time period. It is more likely that the author was referring to traditions of Epicureanism or automatism in pagan or heretical works. As section 2.8 also contends, burning of pagan books was more frequently reported in the age of Justinian, when pagans were barred from teaching, although the sources were written long after the events and refer to these only briefly. As chapters

1–2 and 7 show, some late antique emperors and early medieval kings used book-burning and censorship as a means of social control, often in reaction to current religious struggles for the true way. Heresy and magic conflicts were often connected to conflicts of power, in which book-burning served as a ritual act.

In chapters 4–5, I shall discuss polemical passages of Christian authors of the late fourth and early fifth centuries that have thus far found little attention in the research. The key authors that I will mobilise to discuss this proposition are John Chrysostom, Prudentius, Augustine and Cyril of Alexandria (particularly his *Contra Julianum*) as these authors, to different extents, wrote the last comprehensive polemics specifically against classical and pagan literatures and cultures in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, with the exception of Theodoret of Cyrrhus. I shall show that in Christian polemics charges of magic, *máthema*, *períerga*, heresy, idolatry, and divination applied to many philosophical texts, especially on materialist philosophy and in the area of natural philosophy, as historically developed by Epicurean and Stoic philosophers but also by other old philosophers. Sources on book-burning and censorship-laws in Late Antiquity thus often use a terminology similar to Christian polemics.

Some provisions of ecclesiastical law (for example, the Apostolic Constitutions) barred the clergy from reading both pagan and heretical works, including scientific books disagreeing with the Bible, while permitting the refutation of their arguments against Christianity. Yet it is doubtful that educated clerics abstained entirely from reading pagan books simply because of ecclesiastical law. I shall show that classical works continue to be referred to, suggesting individual if not culturally continued knowledge of their contents. There is evidence in imperial legislation and in literature that books on magic, astrology, divination, various heresies and specific attacks against Christianity (like Porphyry) were officially banned. The categories were sometimes unspecific and could include inquiries into nature contrary to the Christian world view. Laws, especially religious laws, were difficult to implement; rather these laws served as a legal basis that acknowledged the tendencies of that time.

The question of how the polemical discourse of Christian authors relates to the history of Late Antiquity is a difficult one. Sermons and treatises did not necessarily have a discernible effect on behaviour, at least as far as the majority population is concerned. Moreover, as I argue, for example, in sections 3.6, 4.3 and 5.6, these late antique authors often benefitted from what they studied early in their lives and later condemned. The polemical statements given by the Christian authors that I shall discuss probably represent the actual attitudes only of a small percentage of the population. Nor do their views represent what

the state authorities did, although some Christian authors reportedly influenced Roman emperors (for example, Lactantius and Constantine).

However, influential Christian authors, widely circulated among the cloisters of the religion, were authoritative in the monasteries that decided whether or not to preserve a given text, as I shall argue in chapter 7. The *Codices Latini Antiquiores* indicate that the classics hardly circulated in the West from the fifth to eighth centuries, while Christian ecclesiastical texts were predominant. There is also evidence to suggest that in few cases whole groups of classical works were deliberately selected to be deleted and overwritten in around AD 700, often with texts authored by these Christian authors or legal texts that criticised or banned pagan literature. These Christian authors are often called Fathers of the Church, which indicates the influence they had particularly in monastic environments. However, their influence developed over the course of centuries rather than immediately when they wrote. Their texts include exhortations, of varying seriousness, not to read certain pagan books, either because it is more important to read Christian texts or because (in few cases) these pagan books contain dangerous knowledge. These Christian authors were regarded as authoritative in defining orthodoxy, and thus texts were likely to be transmitted only when they were not disagreeing with the opinions of these authors, as far as theological texts were concerned; texts on natural philosophy were often regarded as related to theological texts because heretics often based their opinions on ancient philosophers. Most Protestant Churches base their views primarily on the Bible only rather than on the authority of these later Christian authors.

Some Christian authors of the fourth and fifth centuries (particularly John Chrysostom) constructed the rise of Christianity as a battle of martyrs against emperors, magicians and pagan philosophers, who derided Christianity and provided the ideological background for the Great Persecution. Conceiving history and religion as battlegrounds and writing with an evangelising purpose, John Chrysostom often alluded to the drastically reduced interest in the old philosophers by the end of the fourth century, a point in time when many of their writings had been lost. Christian authors often drew on Porphyry to refute philosophical opinions against Christianity. The main argument of Christian authors of the late fourth and early fifth centuries as to why Christian clerics could be acquainted with ancient pagan texts was that it would allow them to disseminate faith effectively and to refute the arguments of those outside it more effectively. However, much of this polemical discourse could be wishful thinking, constructed to demonstrate that Christianity had now overcome the errors of the past and to ensure that it continues to do so.

Before the third-century crisis, the Stoic and Epicurean philosophical schools were dominant among the elite. Christian authors complained that ma-

terialist world views (although of course not any deeper understanding of these philosophies) were even dominant among the population, if we can trust the polemical discourses of Christian authors on the subject. Thus Christian texts of the first centuries indicate that there was essentially a market-place competition between Christian missionaries and these philosophical schools. Other philosophical branches that eventually terminated in Late Antiquity included the Cynics and the Pythagoreans. Although largely replaced by Christianity and Neoplatonism, literary traditions associated with Stoic and Epicurean philosophies were yet not quite forgotten in the fourth and fifth centuries, at least in oral culture. They continued to be discussed in the writings of non-conformist Christians, or so Christian authors claim, as I shall show in Chapter 4 in addition to earlier research. For example, the influential non-conformist Christian Marcion (second century) was accused of borrowing from Epicurus. Moreover, John Chrysostom, Prudentius and Augustine agree that Manichaeans borrowed from Epicurean traditions. None of these non-conformist writings have been preserved in libraries, but it may well have been that, despite all differences, heretical authors indeed adopted ancient philosophical traditions. The Manichaeans in particular suffered from persecutions and book-burning. Besides handbooks containing old philosophical traditions, even original writings by Epicurus could have been circulating in the late fourth century. Pagans who argued against Christianity seem to have continued to borrow from the tradition of Epicurean and other materialist philosophies, or otherwise there would hardly be a reason why these Christian authors got upset about it.

In his eschatological *City of God against the Pagans*, Augustine influentially put forward the idea, borrowed from Plato, that literature opposed to Christian doctrine should have no place in the ideal Christian society. He attributed the materialist philosophies to Babylon. In similar pictures, Prudentius interpreted the biblical parable of the vine and the branches as the pruning of the unfruitful branches of false philosophy and heresy from the vine of Christian wisdom. Many other Christian authors endorsed Plato's argument for censorship to be applied by the ideal state. Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, a popular poem on Epicurean natural philosophy, is read today; it was read by elite Christian authors in Late Antiquity and locked up in Latin monasteries for several centuries. Texts containing traditions of materialist philosophy were unlikely to be copied. Ironically, the opinions of natural philosophers contrary to Christianity were transmitted and are today accessible in the refutations of influential Christian authors.

Despite the picture that emerges from this, I am keen to stress that Christianity was never monolithic; interpretations of the biblical truth allowed for continuity of the ancient patrimony. Ancient philosophy was the background against which Christian authors constructed the Christian orthodoxy of that time. They

often borrowed from a variety of ancient philosophical schools, mostly from Plato but even from Epicurean philosophy. The basic principle was that ancient philosophers were right whenever their opinions (*dóxai*) were in accordance with Christianity (as currently defined by councils) and they were wrong whenever they were not. Christian monasteries preserved ancient texts.

For all their rhetoric of depreciation, even extremist Christian authors sometimes wrote about the classics in a positive way and used classical next to biblical quotations to convey authority to their arguments. Most lay Christians had little religious reservations towards the classics in the fourth and fifth centuries in the West and well beyond in the East. It has been argued by many that this openness of Christianity (despite its general hostility against paganism) was important for its success. Pagan cult practice, on the other hand, continued after the fourth century, although it had lost much of its attractiveness long before that time. In the East, Neoplatonism continued until the age of Justinian. As I shall show in my discussions of Augustine and Cyril, despite differences and even open hostility Neoplatonists were often close to Christian authors. It is therefore worth noting that Platonism also ignored most other philosophical schools and that according to the Neoplatonic emperor Julian pagan priests should not read Epicurean texts, as we shall see in section 1.5. Many influential Christian authors of Late Antiquity explicitly permitted a Christian appropriated reading of Plato. Their strategy was to allege that Plato was a student of Moses in Egypt. Plato remained the main philosophical authority for centuries.

Yet despite the recent scholarly enthusiasm on the amount of Christian reading and *paideia* in Late Antiquity, I shall also provide evidence that suggests a less optimistic picture. While some classical texts were studied throughout Late Antiquity at least in the East and in Africa, there has also been the argument among clerics to exclude pagan texts entirely from Christian *paideia*. However, this attitude was not widely shared by the lay elite. In the Western part of the Roman Empire there is only scant evidence long after the fifth century that education continued to include reading pagan books, although authors like Vergil and Martianus Capella are known to have circulated. Christian authors of Late Antiquity made use of classical quotations but they were often based on earlier Christian authors or handbooks. To varying degrees, secular and clerical careers continued to require rhetoric, but rhetoric could be learned exclusively from Christian texts or from *florilegia* – late antique handbooks containing quotations from the classics.

Often being aware of the high appeal of their adversaries to educated people, influential Christian authors criticised texts from pagan authors as sexually offensive and devilish because they mentioned several gods instead of one God. Yet, they were more seriously concerned when philosophical opinions seemed

directly to contradict the Bible and were used by pagan philosophers and other groups in the past or present to argue that Christianity is not the true way. They considered Christianity as the purest and most simple explanation of the nature of the world; this explanation, of God having created and moving all things, was true because it was divinely revealed. This belief can be seen as a prime motivation behind the practices that I shall discuss: there is, ultimately, a faith-based, ideological underpinning to the Christian treatment of texts and ideas that they disagreed with which informs their treatment of the same.

To Christian authors of Late Antiquity, the philosophers were wrong, for example, when they posited evolution, originating from the clash of atoms, instead of creation out of nothing. These Christian authors attributed many opinions of ancient philosophers to a demonic, devilish counter-world. For example, they considered natural forces, recognised by certain philosophers, as demonic because natural forces explained the movement of material objects without God. The atoms too were demonic as being independent entities, uncreated matter, impartible, moving automatically and by cohesion in varied order composing the objects of the material world, without divine providence. Other questions of doctrinal importance included predictions on the movement of the stars, the singularity, duration, size and shape of the universe and whether it was a miracle of creation or something that can be explained mathematically; whether human beings were informed about the material world through the various senses (for example, through optics and acoustics) or through the ideas of the soul. The various opinions of the philosophers could cause heretical thinking and had done so in the case of many heretics. Christian authors condemned much of the material which became the basis for modern philosophy and science as magical and heretical because it conflicted with the world-view, or universe-view, that they were promoting.

Natural philosophy (and Epicurean atomism in particular) could negatively affect fear of God and fear of the devil. This was against the interest of the Church which offered a cure against the devil and a moral guide-line with which to avoid punishment in hell, as we shall see in Chapter 4. The Epicurean concepts of joy (*voluptas/hedoné*) and of *libido* were reinterpreted as sin. The Epicurean belief that the soul, as consisting of atoms, does dissolve after death, weakened the likelihood of incarnation, the punishment of sinners in afterlife and the Second Coming of Christ, in the perception of Christian authors of Late Antiquity. In Epicurean teaching, the atoms are controlled by no god, they move automatically and this automatism contradicted the idea that the elements of the material world would cause the end of this world for the Second Coming and the last judgment of sinners. Christian authors of Late Antiquity, on the other hand, posited freedom of human will. They thus argued not only

against prediction by means of divination (except when Christian sources were concerned), but also against Epicureanism, Stoicism and their inherent principles such as determinism and causation. Perhaps this ongoing debate implies that these philosophical ideas continued to fascinate even in the fourth and fifth centuries, despite (or rather because) they conflicted with the Christian doctrine of that time.

The efficiency of censorship laws and of book-burning in Late Antiquity is difficult to assess. All we can say is that targeted texts normally did not survive other than in Christian refutations, be it out of lack of interest (often long before Christianisation) or active refusal to copy these texts or even deliberate or coincidental destruction (for example, when buildings were destroyed or religious items indiscriminately thrown into a bonfire, as we shall see in Chapter 6). On the other hand, over centuries people are unlikely to preserve texts when they have to fear their houses searched, their books confiscated and burnt, and themselves, at least theoretically, punished with death. Nevertheless, magic and astrology were never completely suppressed. As my overall aim is to discuss the role that religion played in the survival and loss of texts, I will therefore begin by analyzing whether and to what extent legislation on book-burning and censorship was enforced by Roman authorities. I will first consider book-bans imposed by pagan emperors and Christian reactions to this.

1 The Great Persecution, the Emperor Julian and Christian Reactions

In the first two chapters, I shall investigate those forms of book-burning and censorship that were sanctioned or tolerated by the Roman authorities. In the first chapter, I shall concentrate on two key events, initiated by pagan emperors of Late Antiquity, the Great Persecution and Julian's school reforms, as well as on the respective reactions by Christian authors. I shall also argue that, while there have always been times when the Roman state did prohibit certain subversive ways to express one's opinion, such as magic and divination, aggravated forms of censorship, such as book-burning, first occurred during the period of Late Antiquity. This chapter will therefore ask for the reasons why this period was a special one in regard to censorship. Within this consideration of Late Antiquity, it will also explain the censorship legislation in the age of Constantine as a reaction to the preceding Great Persecution. I will argue that contemporary Christian authors developed a number of strategies to ridicule and denigrate competing discourses and to blame the persecutions of the recent past on the influence of pagan philosophy. By contrast, they labelled Christianity as the true philosophy opposed, entirely or partly, to many of the philosophical schools of the past. I shall discuss the pertinent passages of Christian authors such as Lactantius, Eusebius, John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus. This understanding of censorship will also lay the groundwork for a later discussion of censorship legislation after Christianity became the state religion.

1.1 Laws against Astrologers and Magicians before the Fourth Century

Magic was common and widely practised in the ancient world, as attested in papyri and other material evidence such as amulets and tablets, containing magic spells, love charms or invocation formulae. Magic was bound up in the rituals and cultures surrounding the gods, religious pantheon, and religious practices of the Roman Empire. It was therefore attached to acts of miracle-healing, divination, astrology, and prediction. But scholars like the natural historian Pliny the Elder regarded magic as treachery to be separated from medicine, re-

ligion and research in the stars as early as the first century.¹ Magic worked because it was suitable to summon demons.

The burning of magical books also had powerful political, social and religious connotations that informed the cultural milieu in which these acts occurred. Within these contexts, the act itself took on the performative aspects of a ritual. Its development in this sense claimed the power of that which it was trying to replace. According to the Christian apologist Hippolytus of Rome (early third century), pagan magicians could burn magical notes to communicate with “demons.”² The Christian appropriation of the act therefore inverted this, taking the spiritual nature of the act of burning itself but using it to avert demonical power.

The association of the written word with something magical was long standing in the Roman world. For example the term *carmen* (“poem, song, writing”) originated as an archaic invocation within the context of pagan cults or pagan philosophical schools.³ The term also came to be used with regard to harmful magic.⁴ The Law of the Twelve Tables, the earliest codification of law in Rome, already ruled the death penalty against incantations of *carmina* as harmful magic, aligning this charge with slander.⁵ Slanderous *carmina* continued to be punished in the imperial period.⁶ In Late Antiquity harmful *carmina* came to be associated with illegitimate pagan cult practice.⁷

Laws prohibiting and limiting its usage predate Christian times. Some emperors, such as Vespasian and Domitian, even expelled oppositional philosophers from the city of Rome in the context of bans of magic and astrology. However, as I have argued elsewhere, it seems probable that blanket bans were rarely enforced and that all edicts and subsequent expulsions were temporary and regionally limited. I have also argued elsewhere that while some books were burnt as a consequence of treason trials in the first century AD, there is no clear evidence that books were destroyed in accordance with laws against magicians, as-

¹ Plin. *nat.* 30.1.

² Hipp. *haer.* 4.28.

³ Liv. 1.20.4; 1.45.5; Cic. *Tusc.* 4.2.3: *nam cum carminibus soliti illi [sc. Pythagorei] esse dicantur et praecepta quaedam occultius tradere et mentes suas a cogitationum intentione cantu fidibusque ad tranquillitatem traducere.*

⁴ Plin. *nat.* 17.267; 28.9.

⁵ *Leg. XII tab.* 8.1 Crawford: *qui malum carmen incantassit ... <quive> occentassit carmen<ve> cond<issit>.* Cic. *rep.* 4.12.

⁶ Paul. *sent.* 5.4.6; 5.4.15.

⁷ Aug. *civ.* 10.9: *non incantationibus et carminibus nefariae curiositatis arte compositis, quam vel magian vel detestabiliore nomine goetian vel honorabiliore theurgian vocant.*

trologers and philosophers before the Christian period.⁸ Astrologers were granted pardon apparently without requiring them to burn their books.⁹ Thus the evidence is against Speyer's conclusion that magic books were regularly persecuted as early as during the Republic.¹⁰ His conclusion is based on the assumption that the *Sententiae*, legal opinions misattributed to jurist Iulius Paulus, were written already in the High Empire and reflect the practice of book-burning during the Republican period. Yet while there is no evidence for precedents from the Republican period, modern research shows that these legal opinions were revised and published perhaps in the age of Diocletian (284–305). They were affirmed by Constantine and again by the Law of Citations from 426.¹¹ It is worth quoting the relevant passage:¹²

No one is permitted to have books on the magic art in his possession. And anyone who is found in possession of such books, will lose his property, the books will be publicly burnt, and he will be deported to an island. Less privileged people will be executed. Not only the practice but also the knowledge of this art is prohibited.

The final sentence marks a change in the legal attitudes towards suspicious writings and may be the addition of a later, possibly Christian, copyist.¹³ It is certainly true that punishments of astrologers became harsher in the late-imperial period: those who had knowledge of this art were to be thrown to the beasts or crucified while magicians (*magi*) were to be burnt alive.¹⁴ We do not know with any certainty when these laws were initially enforced, but Diocletian is the first emperor in Late Antiquity known to have ordered the destruction of books: books owned by the Manichaeans, Egyptian alchemists and Christians. A law issued by the emperors Diocletian and Maximian ruled a general, empire-wide ban on astrology: "To learn and practise the art of geometry is to the public interest. But the damnable art of astrology is illegal."¹⁵ At this time,

⁸ Augustus' burning of uncanonical Sibylline Books was a different case: See Tac. *ann.* 4.34. See Rohmann (2013) for book-burning in the period between 213 BC – AD 200.

⁹ Suet. *Tib.* 36; Dio Cass. 57.15.8–9.

¹⁰ Speyer (1981), 54.

¹¹ *Cod. Theod.* 1.4.1; 1.4.3. On the history of the *sententiae*, Liebs (1995).

¹² Paul. *sent.* 5.23.18: *libros magicæ artis apud se neminem habere licet: et penes quoscumque reperti sint, bonis ademptis, ambustis his publice, in insulam deportantur, humiliores capite puniuntur. non tantum huius artis professio, sed etiam scientia prohibita est.*

¹³ See Baviera and Ferrini (1940), 410, note.

¹⁴ Paul. *sent.* 5.23.17.

¹⁵ *Cod. Iust.* 9.18.2: *artem geometriæ discere atque exerceri publice intersit. ars autem mathematica damnabilis interdicta est.*

the term *ars mathematica* seems to have been limited to astrology because it was explicitly separated from the related field of geometry. No such separation was made in corresponding laws under the Christian emperors.

Diocletian's aim was to rebuild the Roman Empire after it had suffered a long period of crisis. In doing so, he introduced a greater amount of state-control on a political and spiritual level. This led him, among other things, to attempt to control books. As we will see in the next section, he also held Christians responsible for the instability of the recent past.

1.2 The Great Persecution

There is no firm evidence that the Roman state burnt Christian religious books before Christianity became a major religion in the early fourth century. Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in the late fourth century, mentions books from the Judaeo-Christian tradition found in wine jars at several occasions after the early persecutions.¹⁶ Christians could have hidden them to avoid being identified as such. In fact, the Gnostic gospels of Nag el Hammadi have been discovered in wine jars in Egypt.¹⁷ However, this does not mean that they were hidden in response to the Roman authorities attempting to destroy Christian books.

Initiated by Diocletian and his junior partner Galerius, the Great Persecution (303–311) is the first and only case where Roman authorities attempted to destroy visible monuments of Christianity such as assembly places and Bibles, because previous persecutions had created an increasing number of martyrs and therefore strengthened the appeal of Christianity. As Christian texts are the only sources that refer to the burning of Scripture and their accounts are likely exaggerated the question is: how was book-burning during the Great Persecution recorded by near contemporary Christian sources, exactly what books were burnt and what attitudes emerged in Christian texts in reaction to this?

To answer this, we need to position the Great Persecution within Diocletian's broader religious policy. The underlying motivation for any religious persecution probably was the emperors' quasi-divine status that was in conflict with Christian monotheism. Diocletian also had some poor experiences with Christians serving in the military. Before the Great Persecution, Diocletian ordered that books representing other groups be burnt. Although there is little evidence that has survived from these groups that would give further information, we

¹⁶ Epiph. *de mens. et pond.* 18 (Moutsoulas l. 498–518).

¹⁷ See Pagels (1982), 13–14.

know that in 297 Diocletian issued an edict against the Manichaeans: their spiritual leaders were to be burnt alive along with their scriptures.¹⁸ Manichaeism itself was a popular dualistic religion that originated in third-century Mesopotamia, combining syncretistic elements from Christian Gnosticism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. Diocletian also had books concerning the alchemy of gold and silver searched out and burnt in Egypt to cut off the rebellious Egyptians from these resources.¹⁹

A few years later, the co-emperors Diocletian and Galerius ruled similarly against the Christians on 23 February 303. In their presence, the prefect of the East had a church searched for objects of Christian worship in Nicomedia, which had recently become the East's capital city: "The Scriptures were found and burnt."²⁰ In consequence, "imperial edicts were published everywhere, ordering that the churches be razed to the ground and the scriptures be destroyed by fire."²¹

That Diocletian's edict against the Christians and others of similar content were actively enforced is shown by several known Martyr Acts and Passions, recording the suffering of martyrs (although it must be noted that these are of variable historical value).²² Although the edict was valid empire-wide, most of the evidence suggests that it was most rigorously enforced in North Africa. This region was of particular interest for the Catholic sources because the Donatist schism later emerged from here. The Donatists refused to accept indulgence towards those Christians who had surrendered their books during the Great Persecution. According to a tendentious Catholic Passion probably of the early fifth century, the Donatists believed that whoever had thrown the scriptures into the fire was destined to burn in hell in retaliation.²³ The underlying issue was particularly important in cases of bishops accused of having surrendered books, but desiring to keep their offices as the Donatists were unwilling to respect their legitimacy.

According to an official document from 19 May 303 preserved by Christian authors, in the Numidian city of Cirta the local curator had a Christian assembly

18 *Font. iur. Rom.* 2.581. And see Pharr (1932), 290–91.

19 *Jo. Ant. fr.* 191 (Mariev, 348) = *Suid.* s.v. Διοκλητιανός, 1156; and s.v. Χημεία, 280 Adler.

20 *Lact. mort. pers.* 12: *scripturae repertae incenduntur.*

21 *Eus. h.e.* 8.2.4: ...ἡπλωτο πανταχόσε βασιλικά γράμματα, τὰς μὲν ἐκκλησίας εἰς ἔδαφος φέρειν, τὰς δὲ γραφὰς ἀφανεῖς πυρὶ γενέσθαι προστάττοντα. *Eus. m.P.* pr. 1. Cf. *passio S. Felicis episcopi* 1 (Musurillo, 266). For the date, *Lact. mort. pers.* 13.1. See also Sarefield (2004), 200–212.

22 *Eus. h.e.* 8.2.5.

23 Appendix to *Pass. Saturnini* 20–23, ed. Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Note agiografiche* 8 = *Studi e Testi* 65 (Vatican City, 1935), 66–71.

place searched and people interrogated. Although they surrendered one large codex, bookshelves were otherwise found empty, leading some Christians present to denounce seven Christian lectors for concealing the books. On further investigation the authorities recovered 36 codices from these lectors.²⁴ According to another contemporary document churches were also destroyed and Christian scriptures burnt at Zama and Furni near Carthage in Africa Proconsularis. The houses in which Christian books were found were to be destroyed as well.²⁵ Probably authentic, this document is preserved as an attachment to the anti-Donatist work of Optatus of Milevis (in Numidia), who claimed that enforcing the burning of scripture had caused many individuals to suffer martyrdom.²⁶

To a lesser degree, book-burning is also attested outside of North Africa. Eusebius, the Church historian and bishop of Caesarea (in modern Israel), claimed to have witnessed with his own eyes churches being dismantled and books being burnt in the midst of the marketplaces.²⁷ One Passion reports that various Christian books were also publicly burnt in Thrace.²⁸ As with other forms of penal violence in Antiquity, book-burning was staged in a public context for the purpose of purification and deterrence.

Diocletian's edict was surprisingly unspecific as to what scriptures were to be burnt. While most sources suggest that it targeted the gospels and Christian liturgical books, others show that a broader range of Christian writings were also destroyed. During the persecution in the East under Maximian in 304, the Christian women Agape, Irene, and Chione faced trial in Thessaloniki, presided over by the Roman prefect. Their Passion is believed to have been written soon after the events. This does not imply that the words of the martyrs are recorded with historical reliability, but they certainly reflect a near-contemporary resonance:²⁹ "Do you have in your possession any writings, parchments, or books of the impious Christians?"³⁰ The forbidden books of the Christians were associated with the parchment codex, indicating the link between Christian

²⁴ Optat. *app.* 1.17b–19a (2–5 Edwards).

²⁵ Optat. *app.* 2.25b–26b (4–5 Edwards).

²⁶ Optat. 3.1, 8.

²⁷ Eus. *h.e.* 8.2.1.

²⁸ *Pass. Philippi* 4.4; 4.15; 5.4 (Franchi de' Cavalieri, p. 141–144, with commentary on p. 76–9).

²⁹ The date and reliability of various Martyr Acts is now discussed by Moss (2010), Appendix, p. 180–201, here esp. 180–81.

³⁰ *Pass. Agap. et soc.* 4.2 (Musurillo, 286): μή τινά ἐστιν παρ' ὑμῖν τῶν ἀνοσίων Χριστιανῶν ἢ ὑπομνήματα ἢ διφθέραι ἢ βιβλία; *Acta Eupli* (Musurillo, 310–19, of questionable authenticity) report book-burning for Catania in Italy.

texts and the codex.³¹ The prefect is recorded as charging Irene with the offence of not having previously admitted to have “planned to preserve until this day so many parchments, books, tablets, codices, and pages of the unholy writings of the former Christians.”³² Following the trial, the three women were burnt alive and the writings in the cabinets and chests belonging to Irene were publicly burnt.³³ Given the circulation of Christian texts, it is safe to assume that the intent was to humiliate rather than to annihilate the literary tradition.

Some Christians attempted to trick the authorities by offering books with different content. These include two bishops in Carthage and in Numidia, who gave away some written notes, alongside Donatus himself, founder of the Donatists, who surrendered medical manuscripts only.³⁴ Others surrendered any kind of literature in their possession and it is clear that the officials confiscated the books without distinction.³⁵ There is one archaeological find, probably related to the book searches, attesting that a broader range of books than scripture was endangered. In 1889, excavations in Upper Egypt uncovered a codex hidden in the wall of a house, containing two treatises from Philo, the early first-century Greco-Jewish philosopher who was recognized by late antique Christians.³⁶ It seems that a Christian fearful of the edict had hidden the book there. Criticising pagan religion, the Christian apologist Arnobius even claims that certain influential persons demanded a senatorial decree ordering the burning of Cicero’s books on religion, *De natura deorum* and *De divinatione*, because these books seemed to underpin Christian doctrine.³⁷

Although the Acts of the Martyrs suggest that authorities indeed enforced book-burning, the impact of these edicts seems to have been quite limited. For example, the edict of 303 could not have lasted beyond the edict of religious tolerance issued by Galerius in 311, if indeed it lasted beyond its initial prosecutions. Eusebius plausibly suggests that Constantine replaced the loss of any

31 *Passio S. Felicis Episcopi* 12 (Musurillo, 268): “The curator Magnilianus said: ‘Hand over whatever codices or parchments you have’”. (*Magnilianus curator dixit: da libros vel membranas quascumque habes*).

32 *Pass. Agap. et soc.* 5.1 (Musurillo, 286): ἤτις τοσαύτας διφθέρας καὶ βιβλία καὶ πινακίδας καὶ κωδικέλλους καὶ σελίδας γραφῶν τῶν ποτε γενομένων Χριστιανῶν τῶν ἀνοσίων ἐβουλήθης ἄκρι καὶ τῆς σήμερον φυλάξαι.

33 *Pass. Agap. et soc.* 6.1 (Musurillo, 290).

34 Maier (1987), 116 = Aug. *coll. c.Don.* 3.13.25 (CSEL 53:73–4); Aug. *c.Cresc.* 3.27.30 (CSEL 52:435–6).

35 *Optat. app.* 2.26b and 28a (5 and 9 Edwards): *tolle clavem et quos inveneris in cathedra libros et super lapide codices, tolle illos*.

36 Roberts (1963), 14.

37 *Arnob. nat.* 3.7.

copies.³⁸ Nevertheless, Speyer is probably right to argue that the burning of scripture had a psychological impact on future generations, acting as a decisive stimulus for some Christians to act similarly against some pagans once the tables had turned.³⁹

During the persecution, Christians only destroyed copies of the book-burning edict itself. One Christian became a martyr when he seized a notice of the edict posted publicly and “tore it to pieces as an unholy and sacrilegious thing.”⁴⁰ Eusebius adds that this Christian could expect the punishments associated with martyrdom. Echoing Eusebius’ account, later Martyr Acts commemorate a child having suffered martyrdom because it threw a copy of Diocletian’s edict rather than Christian books into the fire.⁴¹ It thus appears that in the Christian response burning of the right kinds of texts was associated with the fate of the body in the afterlife. I shall argue in the next two sections that the memory of book-burning in the age of Diocletian was still alive in the age of his successor, the Christian emperor Constantine.

1.3 Constantine

Constantine (306–337) was the first emperor reported to have become a Christian, which he did formally through baptism at the end of his life. He was also the first emperor to actively promote the Christian Church, notably when his soldiers carried the symbol of Christ on their shields in defeating his rival Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312. Much has been written about Constantine’s religious background, whether he was a genuine convert or simply used Christianity as a political tool, and to what extent he actively sought to curb the old religion. I shall argue that some of the censorship laws in the age of Constantine need to be seen as reactions to the events during the Great Persecution and that the Roman authorities became increasingly concerned with the unity of the church as bishops played an increasing role in local administration.

The scholarly consensus is that although Constantine took selective measures to suppress paganism, he was concerned primarily with effecting compromise between the different religious groups.⁴² Eusebius’ *Life of Constantine* generally tends to overemphasise the Christian character of Constantine’s reign. He

³⁸ Eus. *v.C.* 3.1. And see 4.36, too.

³⁹ Speyer (1981), 77, 127.

⁴⁰ Eus. *h.e.* 8.5: ὡς ἀνοσίαν καὶ ἀσεβεστάτην ἀνελὼν σπαράττει. Also: Lact. *mort. pers.* 13.

⁴¹ *Pass. Paphnut. et soc.* 16 (Delehay, 337, with p. 134–6 for a French summary).

⁴² Eus. *v.C.* 3.53–6, 58; Socr. *h.e.* 1.18; Soz. *h.e.* 2.5. See articles in Lenski (2006b).

gives an exaggerated account that Constantine destroyed temples everywhere, but gives very few examples. He suggests that the Aphrodite temple of Aphaca was completely demolished, along with its dedications,⁴³ because of the temple prostitution practised there. He also alleges the demolition of the temple of Asclepius in Cilicia, associated with the pagan sage Apollonius of Tyana, who had turned the temple into a “holy Lyceum and academy.”⁴⁴ The temple may therefore have housed books, but this is not explicitly evidenced. Nevertheless, Eusebius’ account often runs contrary to extant archaeological evidence of temple destruction.

There were three genres of books that were ordered for burning at different occasions in the age of Constantine. The first category is that of anonymous pamphlets (*famosi libelli*). This was not unprecedented because the emperors of the first century had occasionally taken steps against political pamphlets they considered slanderous, especially ones published in reaction to political crises.⁴⁵ The *Codex Theodosianus* (9.5.1) lists a treason law given by the emperor Constantine on 1 January 314. Inscriptions give a fuller text of the original edict: any pamphlet posted anonymously was either to be shredded or burnt in the fire. An inquisition (*inquisitio*) was to be conducted to search for the authors, who could expect the capital punishment.⁴⁶ It is not known whether or not the edict was enforced in Rome. Although scholars suggested redating the edict to 320 because it is addressed to the *praefectus urbi* Maximus (who was in office between the end of 317 and 323⁴⁷), it does not seem to be related to either the Donatist or Arian controversy which just came into play at about that time. Rather, the edict seems to echo a canon of the synod of Elvira (Spain), which probably dates from the first decade of the fourth century. According to this canon anyone

⁴³ Eus. v.C. 3.55.4.

⁴⁴ Eus. v.C. 3.56; Philostr. VA 1.7 with Averil Cameron and Hall (1999), 303: There is evidence to suggest that the temple continued to function or was destroyed later.

⁴⁵ Augustus: Dio Cass. 56.27.1 with 55.27.1–2; Suet. *Dom.* 8.3. According to Paul. *sent.* 5.4 = *font. iur. Rom. ant.* 2:389–91, the authors of slanderous writings were to be expelled, but the law does not order the destruction of these writings.

⁴⁶ Three inscriptions containing the law are extant. Quoted in Heichelheim and Schwarzenberger (1947), 3: *sane et undique versum securitati innocentium consulatur, placet etiam famosos libellos non admitti. quos sine nomine propositos si quis invenerit, statim detrudere oportebit, ut, si forte ad se talis libellus perlatus fuerit, igni eum praecipiat concremari, cum eiusmodi scripturam ab audientia iudicis penitus oporteat submoveri manente contra eos inquisitione qui libellos eiusmodi proponere ausi fuerint, ut reperti debitae temeritatis suae poenis subiciantur.*

⁴⁷ On the date, Barnes (1976b).

who puts pamphlets in a church was anathematized.⁴⁸ This shows the religious character of these pamphlets. A few years later, in 325, Constantine presided at the council of Nicaea and is said to have burnt the petitions of bishops dissenting in the Arian controversy symbolically in order to end this controversy, as if the dissenting petitions had never existed and the unity of the church never been challenged.⁴⁹ The *Codex Theodosianus* also preserves four laws against *famosi libelli* (pamphlets) from around this time period. Constantine seems to have reacted to anonymous writings circulating in the province of Africa, in Rome and in Tyre (Palestine) as evidence for accusations. These *famosi libelli* were to be burnt, their authors punished, but there is no evidence for systematic searches.⁵⁰ Similarly to the pamphlets circulating in Elvira, these pamphlets were probably of a religious character and therefore threatening the unity of the church. The laws were thus a reaction to an immediate crisis, however a religious rather than a political one. This indicates a change compared to previous centuries.

The second category of books banned in the age of Constantine encompassed books authored by Christians, but the definitions were vague and imprecise. Eusebius preserves a letter that Constantine sent to the provincial governors shortly after the council of Nicaea to explain an edict against certain Christian groups. The edict, perhaps issued along with the heresy laws of 326,⁵¹ is not preserved. Yet we know from Eusebius that similarly to Diocletian Constantine ordered the confiscation of assembly places and the search for and destruction of books. The edict generally targeted non-conformist Christians and specifically the followers of Arius, but also the Novatians, Valentinians, Marcionites, Paulianists and Cataphrygians (Montanists).⁵² Similarly to the Paulianists, Arius had put forward the idea that Jesus was not consubstantial with God the father. The council of Nicaea in 325 rejected the Arian Christological view. The Novatians were regarded as schismatic as they did not accept readmission of Christians who had denied their faith during persecution, while the Montanists believed in the prophecies of their founder Montanus. It is not known to what extent the edict was enforced. Eusebius certainly exaggerates his claim that the inquiries established the unity of the Church as Arianism long continued to be attractive. In fact, his testimonial is the only one saying that books were actually targeted: “this law also ordered the books of these persons to be tracked

⁴⁸ *Conc. Eliberit.* c. 52 (Mansi 2:14): *hi qui inventi fuerint libellos famosos in ecclesia ponere, anathematizentur.*

⁴⁹ *Rufin. hist.* 10.2.

⁵⁰ *Cod. Theod.* 9.34.1–4 (3: *flammi aboleri*) from 319–328.

⁵¹ *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.1–2.

⁵² *Eus. v.C.* 3.64.

down, and they were caught pursuing forbidden evil arts.”⁵³ Nevertheless, it suggests that this decree did target magic books, certain Christian books and offshoots that did not conform to the council of Nicaea.

A link exists between these non-conformist authors and Epicurean atomism. Early Christian apologists, such as Tertullian accused people like Marcion and Valentinus of having adopted Epicurean teaching for their theology.⁵⁴ Although their original writings have not survived, it is therefore possible that these Gnostic authors and their followers (which are mentioned in the edict) borrowed from Epicurean philosophy. The anonymous apologetic-polemical *Dialogue on the True Faith in God* goes even so far as to claim that Marcion accepted the Epicurean teaching of the origin of the world without creation (*automatismón*).⁵⁵ Against this proposition is the reality that the Gnostic belief in the dualism of material and spiritual worlds seriously disagreed with Epicurean materialism. Thus the apologists to some extent may have used this link polemically to cast in a negative light the Gnostic belief that the highest god was detached from the material world.

Finally, Constantine issued an edict concerning the burning of books written by the Neoplatonic philosopher, Porphyry. The exact date is unknown, but it was certainly issued before 333. The Church historian Socrates quotes a letter of Constantine from that year, in which, probably responding to specific requests, he addressed the bishops and congregations to remind them of an earlier edict not otherwise transmitted: “Porphyry, the enemy of piety, has composed unlawful books against religion, and therefore found a deserved compensation, namely that he became shameful for the future, was infected with the worst reputation, and his sacrilegious books were obliterated.”⁵⁶ Porphyry’s work *Against the Christians* was probably the main target. The work itself is not extant anymore, only fragments survive through Christian refutations. In context, Arius

53 Eus. *υ.ϭ.* 3.66.1: ἐπεὶ καὶ διερευνᾶσθαι τῶν ἀνδρῶν τὰς βίβλους διηγόρευεν ὁ νόμος, ἡλίσκοντό τ’ ἀπειρημένους κακοτεχνίας μετιόντες.

54 Tert. *adv. Marc.* 5.19; 1.25; *adv. Val.* 7.4; 14.1. See Schmid (1962), 799–800, and, more critically, Braun (1990), 310–12. Hipp. *haer.* 7.29 asserts a link between Marcion and Empedocles. Epiphanius of Salamis in his *Medicine Chest (Panarion)* lists Hellenism and its subgroups Stoics, Platonists, Pythagoreans and Epicureans among the origins of heresies (*anacephalaeosis* 1; 1.1.3, 1.1.5–8). Similarly, Marcellus of Ancyra wrote against the converted Arian sophist Asterius. Copies of his book were burnt: Socr. *h.e.* 1.36; Soz. *h.e.* 2.33.

55 *De recta in Deum fide* 2.19 (GCS 4:100).

56 Socr. *h.e.* 1.9.30–31, at 30: ὥσπερ τοῖνον Πορφύριος ὁ τῆς θεοσεβείας ἐχθρὸς συντάγματα ἄττα παράνομα κατὰ τῆς θρησκείας συστησάμενος ἄξιον εὖρατο μισθόν, καὶ τοιοῦτον, ὥστε ἐπονεῖδιστον μὲν αὐτὸν πρὸς τὸν ἐξῆς γενέσθαι χρόνον καὶ πλείστης ἀναπλησθῆναι κακοδοξίας, ἀφανισθῆναι δὲ τὰ ἀσεβῆ αὐτοῦ συγγράμματα.

and his followers were to be denominated Porphyrians because of the similarity of their respective thinking. Preserved also by other Christian authors, and similarly to the earlier edict against Arians and other groups, the letter explained an edict from the same year, addressed to the bishops and the people and directed exclusively against Arius and his followers: “If anyone finds a book authored by him or agreeing with him, he shall throw it into the fire, in order that no memory of Arius or of the doctrine which he had introduced might circulate. If anyone is found guilty of concealing such books and of not having immediately denounced and burnt them, then death shall be his penalty and decapitation.”⁵⁷ Again we do not know if the edict was enforced or who may have enforced it, but it was surely in the interest of the clergy, to which the letter was addressed, to do so. It is therefore important to note that anyone who had knowledge of the whereabouts of Arian books, needed to burn and denounce these in order to avoid execution. The edict could thus have been efficient without any organised book-searches, if there were a sufficient amount of people willing to denounce others.

In sum, it is clear that under the first Christian emperor books were reportedly ordered to be burnt, although there is little information on the enforcement of these orders. This included books of various heretical content and anti-Christian works by Porphyry, who seems to have played some role in the Great Persecution. Some Christian apologists claimed that some of these heretical works originated in, or were close to, Epicurean philosophy. The aim was to guarantee the unity of the church, which in turn ensured control of the state. This unity was threatened not only by heretical, but also by some philosophical works, which reportedly informed heretical opinions. I shall argue in the next section that influential Christian authors blamed the responsibility for the Great Persecution on contemporary philosophical authors and in doing so, they argued that some philosophical works were now problematic.

1.4 Christian Reactions to the Great Persecution

How did Christian authors respond to book-burning during the Great Persecution? The Christian authors that I shall discuss in this section, such as Lactantius

⁵⁷ Soz. *h.e.* 1.21.4: καὶ τοῖς πανταχῇ ἐπισκόποις καὶ λαοῖς νομοθετῶν ἔγραψεν ἀσεβεῖς ἡγεῖσθαι αὐτόν τε καὶ τοὺς αὐτοῦ ὁμόφρονας καὶ πυρὶ παραδιδόναι, εἴ τι αὐτῶν εὐρίσκοιτο σύγγραμμα, ὥστε μήτε αὐτοῦ μήτε τοῦ δόγματος, οὗ εἰσηγήσατο, ὑπόμνημα φέρεσθαι. εἰ δέ τις φωραθεῖ κρυπτῶν καὶ μὴ παραχρῆμα καταμηνύσας ἐμπρήση, θάνατον εἶναι τὴν ζημίαν καὶ τιμωρίαν εἰς κεφαλὴν. Many other versions survive: Opitz (1934), 67–8; Socr. *h.e.* 1.9.30–31; Gel. *Cyz. h.e.* 2.36.1–2 (GCS 28:128); Niceph. Call. *h.e.* 8.18 (PG 146:73A).

and Eusebius (and indeed most of the Christian authors that I will discuss throughout this book), were themselves interested in many aspects of ancient philosophy and literature. Within this context, they tried to defend Christianity from reservations that educated people may have had. They also wanted to rival ancient authors and to create the intellectual backdrop against which Christianity could establish itself as a mainstream position. Their attacks on rival religions and philosophies need therefore to be seen within the context of ancient discourses of competition. I shall argue that oral or written attacks by rival philosophical schools and the rival philosophies themselves came to be seen as problematic and that these discourses to some extent provided the ideological underpinning of censorship legislation in the age of Constantine and perhaps later. For example, Arnobius' contemporary work *Against the Pagans* (c. 303) is the first polemic to suggest that pagan rather than Christian books deserved to be burnt. In context of the following passage, Arnobius derides pagan gods and institutions originating in paganism, such as the games and plays, and also poetry:⁵⁸

But if you were somewhat enraged in behalf of your religion, you should rather long ago have burnt these writings, destroyed those books and dismantled these theatres, in which the infamies of the deities are daily made public in most shameful stories. For why have *our* scriptures deserved to be given to the flames?

Highly educated, much of Arnobius' call is rhetoric. Arnobius was building on a Christian discourse intended to dissuade fellow Christians from believing things that he personally did not believe, nor is he suggesting that Christians should destroy these books. Yet it indicates the degree of anger momentarily felt by him over the recent burning of books. According to Jerome (who may have been misinformed) Arnobius wrote this apologist polemic to show his bishop that he had become a real Christian after he had taught the material he now condemned.⁵⁹ This could also explain his polemical attitude at the time of writing.

Lactantius, famous student of Arnobius, appears to have taken his teacher's position further. His rhetoric was also probably motivated by personal experi-

⁵⁸ Arnob. *nat.* 4.36: *quod si haberet vos aliqua vestris pro religionibus indignatio, has potius literas, hos exurere debuistis olim libros, [istos] demoliri, dissolvere theatra haec potius, in quibus infamiae numinum propudiosis cotidie publicantur in fabulis. Nam nostra quidem scripta cur ignibus meruerunt dari?*

⁵⁹ Hier. *chron.*, a. Abr. 2343, AD 327 (GCS 47:231).

ence and momentary feelings. He had taught at the imperial court at Nicomedia as a pagan teacher before becoming unemployed from 303 to c. 315 because he had converted. He states:⁶⁰

Eloquence was extinguished, lawyers were removed, legal experts either exiled or slain, literature was regarded as an evil art, and those knowledgeable in it were crushed and cursed as public enemies.

As it is discussing the persecution of Christians and aiming to show that those responsible for this were justly punished by God with untimely deaths, Lactantius' narrative is certainly exaggerated and generalising, with no reference to specific cases. But his account implies that the emperor Galerius' categorisation of public enemies and of evil (magical) arts in scholarship was extended to Christian scholars.

Lactantius penned his *Divine Institutions*, a justification of Christianity against pagan religion and philosophy, shortly before the edict of toleration at a time when memories of the persecution were still fresh. This work helps to understand the edict against Porphyry. Addressed to Constantine, the first chapters of book five deal with the conflict between Christians, philosophers, and pagan literature: "Philosophers, orators, and poets are pernicious" because the influence of their writings could cause Christians to waver. They are "sweets concealing poison."⁶¹ Lactantius did not criticise teaching and literature per se, but he wanted them to be grounded in the Christian faith: "I wished to combine wisdom with religion, that that vain doctrine may cause no harm to the students."⁶² Lactantius' strategy of appropriating ancient education was also one designed to appeal to the interest of the clergy, arguing that education was helpful for the dissemination of faith and that as Christian authors were better anyway they could easily replace their pagan peers (5.1.21–8).

In this context, Lactantius pictures philosophers as deriding Christians and the Bible because they lacked eloquence (5.1.18). Philosophers even felt contaminated by the Bible and forced to purify themselves by destroying and cursing it (5.1.1). He implicitly acknowledges that philosophers are similar to Christians in as much as they too consider their teaching to be the true way and that of the

⁶⁰ Lact. mort. pers. 22.4: *eloquentia extincta, causidici sublatis, iure consulti aut relegati aut necati, litterae autem inter malas artes habitae, et qui eas noverant, pro inimicis hostibusque protrititi et execrati.*

⁶¹ Lact. inst. 5.1.10: *philosophi et oratores et poetae perniciosi sunt ... mella sunt haec venena tegentia.*

⁶² Lact. inst. 5.1.11: *volui sapientiam cum religione coniungere, ne quid studiosis inanis illa doctrina possit officere.*

other to be an error (5.1.17; 5.2.5), but it is difficult to validate his position as philosophical treatises against Christianity have scarcely survived.

He does not give any names of his adversaries. However, he seems to be thinking of one such treatise authored by Sossianus Hierocles. As prefect of Egypt, Hierocles initiated the Great Persecution of 303 and wrote an anti-Christian treatise shortly before (5.2.12–17; known from the reply *Against Hierocles*, attributed to Eusebius). It is also likely that Lactantius had in mind the third-century philosopher Porphyry (5.2.4).⁶³ Lactantius acknowledges Porphyry's treatise *Against the Christians*, claiming that its initial positive reception "changed into blame and rejection" and that Christians derided his work and found it "ridiculous."⁶⁴ This appears to allude to the book-burning edict issued by Constantine against Porphyry, or rather an appeal to burn his books as the edict was issued probably not long after Lactantius wrote his book.

In the first book of the *Divine Institutions*, Lactantius commented on the ancient Romans' practice of burning religious books, noting that they destroyed all copies extant of the religious books of their archaic king Numa but failed to conceal their actions: "everyone then in the senate was very stupid because the books could have been destroyed, but the event itself not remembered."⁶⁵ As we have seen that Constantine issued an edict against the non-conformist Christian Arius following a similar edict against Porphyry in order that no memory of his teaching should survive it may be that Lactantius was ideologically underpinning a robust approach to suppressing literature.

Moreover, Lactantius aligns himself with earlier Latin Christian apologists, his own personal engagement with this genre showing a shift from defence to attack: "I shall overthrow earlier authors, together with all their writings, and cut off from future authors any possibility to write or to reply."⁶⁶ He implores and invites "learned and eloquent" Christians to follow his example, predicting that if successful "nobody can doubt that false religions will quickly disappear, and philosophy altogether fall, if everyone shall be persuaded that this [Christianity] is the only religion and also the only true wisdom."⁶⁷ Lactantius was ad-

⁶³ See DePalma Digeser (1998).

⁶⁴ Lact. inst. 5.2.11: *in culpam reprehensionemque conversa est*; 5.2.8: *ridiculus*.

⁶⁵ Lact. inst. 1.22.6–8, at 8: *nemo ergo tunc in senatu non stultissimus; potuerunt enim et libri aboleri et tamen res in memoriam non exire*.

⁶⁶ Lact. inst. 5.4.2: *ut et priores cum suis omnibus scriptis perverterem et futuris omnem facultatem scribendi aut respondendi amputarem*.

⁶⁷ Lact. inst. 5.4.8: *evanituras brevi religiones falsas et occasuram esse omnem philosophiam nemo dubitaverit, si fuerit omnibus persuasum cum hanc solam religionem, tum etiam solam veram esse sapientiam*.

vocating the intellectual overthrow of other positions. He does not deride the classics here because in this context he quotes the old poet Ennius. Similarly, whenever other Christian authors wrote about “philosophy” or “wisdom” in this understanding they had in mind the true Christian way of life rather than the theoretical reflection about life and the world. Christian true philosophy could even mean a religious life of asceticism that did not require literacy.⁶⁸

Similarly, Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea and author of a notable Church history, called for the disposal of certain pagan books, albeit in a rhetorical question. His *Praeparatio Evangelica* justified the truth of the gospel against the background of philosophical attacks soon after Constantine’s and Licinius’ agreement on religious tolerance in the edict of Milan in 313.⁶⁹ Arguing against Porphyry, he interpreted certain philosophical tenets as preparing the way for Christianity, while refuting others:⁷⁰

For to pass over the nonsense of the Egyptians and their very loquacious absurdity, and to go on to the physical theories of the Greek philosophers, what person of right attitude would not at once censure those who attempt to give such gross misinterpretations? [...] Why indeed do they not reject the shameful and improper fables about the gods as unlawful and impious, and make unseen the very books concerning them, as containing blasphemous and licentious teaching, and celebrate the one, only and unseen God simply and purely, without any shameful circumscription?

In this passage, Eusebius positions Greek physical theories as condemnable, as well as certain parts of poetry for their sexually explicit nature and their challenge to monotheism because of their depiction of multiple gods. In order to discuss physical theories by Greek philosophers regarding the nature of the gods and the origin of the world that are opposed to Christian theology, he quotes explicitly from authors like Plato and Plutarch. Although he otherwise does not mention the philosophers that he criticises in this book, he does refer to prominent Greek philosophers having theorised about the origin of the world in another (7.12: Thales, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Epicurus, Democritus

⁶⁸ Papadogiannakis (2012), 93–117; Siniosoglou (2008), 115–22; Malingrey (1961), 114–28; Laistner (1951), 53–4; Ath. v. *Anton.* 72–3 is an interesting ancient testimonial.

⁶⁹ On the *Praeparatio Evangelica*, see Johnson (2006).

⁷⁰ Eus. *p.e.* 3.13.10, 22 (SC 228:238, 244): ἵνα γὰρ τὸν Αἰγυπτιακὸν παρελθὼν τις λῆρον καὶ τὴν πολλὴν αὐτῶν καὶ ἀδόλεσχον φλυαρίαν ἐπὶ τὰς τῶν σοφῶν Ἑλλήνων μετέλθοι φυσιολογίας, τίς οὐκ ἂν τῶν εὖ φρονούντων αὐτόθεν καταμέμψαιτο τοῖς τὰ τοιαῦτα παρεξηγεῖσθαι πειρωμένοις; ... τί δὴτα τοιγαροῦν οὐχὶ τὰς αἰσχράς καὶ ἀπρεπεῖς περὶ θεῶν μυθολογίας ὡς ἂν ἀθέσμιους καὶ ἀσεβεῖς παραιτησάμενοι καὶ αὐτάς γε τὰς περὶ τούτων βίβλους ὡς δυσσεβῆ καὶ ἀκόλαστα περιεχούσας ἀφανεῖς ποιήσαντες, τὸν ἕνα καὶ μόνον καὶ ἀόρατον θεὸν γυμνῶς καὶ καθαρῶς καὶ ἄνευ τινὸς αἰσχρᾶς περιπλοκῆς ἀνυμνοῦσι;

and Empedocles). Eusebius, like Lactantius, had a major influence on the emperor Constantine.

A later possible allusion to the Great Persecution and following destruction of books by Porphyry is John Chrysostom's polemical *Discourse on the Blessed Babylas, against Julian and the Pagans*. John (c. 347–407) is one of the most prolific authors of Late Antiquity. John's polemical thrust partly originated because of a need to compete with educated pagans and the contemporary debates of his time. Antioch perhaps exemplifies this more than most other locations. It was a culturally diverse city in which different groups struggled for influence. The origins of John's intellectual position can perhaps be found in his life. Based in the mountains outside of Antioch, John was a rigorous ascetic, spending two years of extreme asceticism in a cave. In later life, he became presbyter of the Antioch congregation. Although not much is known about these 12 years, the majority of sermons I will discuss belong to this period. Since 398 he was bishop of Constantinople, a position second in status only after the bishop of Rome. However, he was banished in 403 and again in 404. In many of his sermons and other pieces John was highly polemical, criticising his Christian audience for lax attitudes and being well aware of competing pagan groups and schools in Antioch.

The *Discourse on Babylas* contains an interesting passage about the disappearance of philosophical books that has hitherto drawn scarce attention. I shall discuss this passage in its historical setting. Briefly summarising its immediate context, John argues for the superiority of Christianity over paganism because the knowledge of noteworthy pagans of the past is almost lost, while the miracles of the first Christians are celebrated throughout the then known world, citing the prophet Zoroaster and Zamolxis, disciple of Pythagoras, as examples. According to John, there are only a few persons who still know these two names let alone their teachings. This, he suggests, is because their accounts are fictitious whereas the Christian truth will withstand even the mightiest attempt to destroy it: "The tyrants and emperors, the sophists invincible in their speech as well as the philosophers, sorcerers, magicians and demons have all been keen to destroy it," putting philosophers alongside magicians.⁷¹ It is important to read the following passage in this context of persecution:⁷²

71 Chrys. *pan. Bab.* 2.11 (SC 362:102): καὶ τύραννοι καὶ βασιλεῖς καὶ λόγων ἄμαχοι σοφισταὶ ἤδη δὲ καὶ φιλόσοφοι καὶ γόητες καὶ μάγοι καὶ δαίμονες καθελεῖν ἐσπούδασαν. Cf. *hom. 8 in Mt.* 4 (PG 57:87): "You will find that she (Egypt), who is the mother of poets, philosophers and magicians and the inventor of all forms of wizardry, now prides herself on the fishermen" (Καὶ τὴν ποιητῶν καὶ σοφῶν καὶ μάγων μητέρα, καὶ τὴν πᾶν εἶδος μαγικῆς εὐροῦσαν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις διαδοῦσαν, ταύτην ὄψει νῦν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀλιεῦσι καλλωπιζομένην).

The philosophers and distinguished orators were very famous among the people because of their dignity and ability to speak, but after the battle against us they became ridiculous and seemed no different from silly children. From so many nations and peoples, they were not able to change anyone, wise, ignorant, man, woman, not even a small child. There is so much laughter against their writings that their book-scrolls were long ago obliterated, and mostly perished as soon as they appeared. If anything at all is found preserved, one finds it preserved by Christians.

John appears to be saying that philosophical and oratorical books have perished and are found only preserved by Christians. He was perhaps thinking of the old philosophers (such as Epicurus) whom he could assume were hardly circulating anymore. This passage has been translated differently, suggesting that it means either books being lost by neglect or deliberately destroyed.⁷³

In order to understand whether John is talking about loss or destruction of books, it is necessary to discuss this passage philologically and to read further into the following context within the treatise. The constitution of the text is reliable because it has been transmitted without variation in manuscripts extant since the ninth century.⁷⁴ Schatkin provides a translation of this decisive passage: “their books disappeared a long time ago, and mostly perished when they first appeared.”⁷⁵ However, in both the active and passive voice *aphanisthénai* primarily means “to destroy” or “to obliterate (writing).”⁷⁶ A further possible interpretation of the passive voice that is used in this passage is “suppressed”⁷⁷ with regard to writing and also “to disappear” in the context of “persons buried by a sand-storm or lost at sea.”⁷⁸ John himself also elsewhere uses the term in

72 Chrys. *pan. Bab.* 2.11 – 12 (SC 362:104 – 10): οἱ δὲ φιλόσοφοι καὶ δεινοὶ ῥήτορες δόξαν πολλὴν οἱ μὲν ἐπὶ σεμνότητι οἱ δὲ ἐπὶ λόγων δυνάμει παρὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἔχοντες μετὰ τὴν πρὸς ἡμᾶς μάχην καταγέλαστοι γεγονάσι καὶ παίδων ληρούντων ἀπλῶς οὐδὲν διαφέρειν ἔδοξαν. ἀπὸ γὰρ ἐθνῶν καὶ δῆμων τοσοῦτων οὐ σοφόν τινα, οὐκ ἄσοφον, οὐκ ἄνδρα, οὐ γυναῖκα ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ παιδίον μικρὸν μεταπίσαι ἴσχυσαν, ἀλλὰ τοσοῦτός ἐστι τῶν ὑπ’ αὐτῶν γεγραμμένων ὁ γέλως ὥστε ἀφανισθῆναι καὶ τὰ βιβλία πάλαι καὶ ἅμα τῷ δειχθῆναι καὶ ἀπολέσθαι τὰ πολλὰ. εἰ δέ που τι καὶ εὐρεθείη διασωθὲν παρὰ Χριστιανοῖς τοῦτο σωζόμενον εὔροι τις ἄν.

73 Speyer (1981) offers two different interpretations: ancient literature is forgotten (p. 124) or anti-Christian books have been destroyed (p. 135, note 24). Similarly: Schatkin (1967), 47.

74 See Schatkin (1990), SC 362:90.

75 Schatkin and Harkins (1985), 82.

76 *LSJ*, 286, I.1 – 6. According to Stephanus’ *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae* (2:2611 – 12), the passive voice usually has the same meanings as the active voice, including the notion of utter destruction.

77 Th. 7.8.2.

78 Hdt. 3.26; Th. 8.38.

the sense of wilful destruction in the context of the loss of books of the Old Testament:⁷⁹

Even before the captivity many books had been obliterated and the Jews drifted into the worst degree of impiety. This is clear from the end of the fourth book of Kings [4Reg. 22:8; 2Chr. 34:14] because the book of Deuteronomy could hardly be found and was buried somewhere in a dunghill.

The verb *aphanídso* here means the wilful destruction of books. This is obvious also from what John says shortly before: “probably it was actually written in some books, and the books have been obliterated”, because he adds the explanation: “many books were destroyed and few were preserved, even in the first captivity.”⁸⁰ The emperors Julian and Constantine too used *aphanídso* clearly to refer to book-destruction.⁸¹

Schatkin then translates *apolésthai* as “to perish” because this translation is common for the Aorist Middle Voice particularly in the New Testament.⁸² However, the primary meaning in the active voice ranges from “to destroy utterly” to “to lose.” Mayer translates this term as “to destroy” in the context of barbarians sacking cities elsewhere in John Chrysostom.⁸³ Schatkin also translates the phrase *háma to deichthénai* to English as “when they first appeared” and to French as *qu’au moment même de leur publication* as if John wanted to say that philosophical and rhetorical books were so insignificant that they got lost right after publication. However, there is no instance for *deíknymi* (literally “to show”) meaning “to publish”, but there is at least one passage where the term

⁷⁹ Chrys. *hom. 3 in 1 Cor.* 3 (PG 61:58): καὶ γὰρ πρὸ τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας πολλὰ ἡφάνιστο βιβλία, τῶν Ἰουδαίων εἰς ἐσχάτην ἀσέβειαν ἐξοκειλάντων. καὶ δῆλον ἐκ τοῦ τέλους τῆς τετάρτης τῶν Βασιλειῶν· τὸ γὰρ Δευτερονόμιον μόλις που εὑρηται ἐν κοπρίᾳ κατακεχασμένον. I give the PG reference instead of Field’s earlier edition of the sermons on Matthew and the letters of Paul as the PG is more accessible.

⁸⁰ Chrys. *hom. 3 in 1 Cor.* 3 (PG 61:58): ...ἡ εἰκὸς καὶ γεγράφθαι ἐν βίβλοις, καὶ ἡφανίσθαι τὰ βιβλία. Καὶ γὰρ πολλὰ διεφθάρη βιβλία, καὶ ὀλίγα διεσώθη, καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς προτέρας αἰχμαλωσίας. Similarly: Chrys. *hom. 9 in Mt.* 4 (PG 57:180–81): “Many of the prophetic books were obliterated; and this one may see from the history of the Chronicles. For being careless, and continuously falling into impiety, some they suffered to perish, others they themselves burnt and shredded.” (πολλὰ γὰρ τῶν προφητικῶν ἡφάνισται βιβλίων· καὶ ταῦτα ἐκ τῆς ἱστορίας τῶν Παραλειπομένων ἴδοι τις ἂν. ῥάθυμοι γὰρ ὄντες, καὶ εἰς ἀσέβειαν συνεχῶς ἐμπίπτοντες, τὰ μὲν ἡφίεσαν ἀπόλλυσθαι, τὰ δὲ αὐτοὶ κατέκαιον καὶ κατέκοπτον).

⁸¹ See section 1.3 (with regard to Porphyry) above and 1.5 below.

⁸² John 3:16; 1Cor. 1:18.

⁸³ Chrys. *hom. 5 in Eph.* (PG 62:48): πόλεις ὁλόκληροι κατεποντίσθησαν καὶ ἀπώλοντο. Mayer (2005), 452 with note 683. Cf. Lampe, *PGL*, 200: “3. med., perish, be destroyed or lost.”

means “to inform against, to denounce”, related to accusers.⁸⁴ This interpretation is intriguing, for it matches what is described in Ammianus and elsewhere, that books were searched out based on private accusations, as we shall see in section 2.1.

The term *pálai* (“a long time ago”) speaks against the assumption that John had in mind pagan books recently burnt. However, the term can alternatively, if less frequently, indeed mean “recently.” This would fit with John’s rhetorical statement in the following passage that the destruction of Hellenism happened in “such a short time.”⁸⁵ The philological discussion of the passage on the loss of books written by philosophers and orators therefore shows that John had in mind a wilful destruction of books in the past rather than a declining interest in these books.

Secondly, from the aggressiveness of John’s language following the passage on the disappearance of books, it is also clear that he wanted to give the impression of destruction rather than disappearance by neglect; he compares pagans and their literature to scorpions, serpents and intestinal worms torturing the Christian’s body. He stresses, however, that Christians rely on persuasion rather than on violence to extirpate other belief. In John’s understanding these animals are demons, agents of the devil. It is the mission of any devout Christian to fight these in order to avoid getting entrapped in their snares and dragged into hell-fire. Emphasising the frivolous character of pagan literature, this passage thus reveals a missionary strategy. It is in line with the monastic education at that time as Antony, the father of all monks, had fought the demons of his own sexuality in the shape of a snake or dragon.⁸⁶

Yet, having argued that John was alluding to destruction rather than neglect of books when saying that the writings of the philosophers and orators had perished, it is worth asking which writers John was thinking of in particular. It is unlikely that he was alluding to the whole of ancient literature on these subjects. Rather, because John mentions persecuting emperors, assisted by philosophers, John may have been thinking of the writings of pagan philosophers hostile to Christianity, particularly Porphyry, whose writings had indeed been ordered to be destroyed and had been ridiculed by Christian authors long ago. In this case he would be referring to the Great Persecution that began in 303. This supports the scholarly opinion that John wrote the *Discourse on Babylas* to refute Porphyry’s *Against the Christians*. It is also possible that the passage alludes

⁸⁴ *LSJ* 1, p. 373, 5: *Ar. eq.* 278.

⁸⁵ See p. 45 below: ἐν οὕτω χρόνῳ βραχεῖ.

⁸⁶ *Ath. v. Anton.* 6.

to the magic trials and book-burning that happened in Antioch some years ago as we will see in section 2.1. This reading could be justified because John as well as his audience had experienced these events, a number of philosophers were affected by the magic trials and the initial conspiracy had an anti-Christian thrust. On balance, John appears to conflate three different layers of historical allusion: burning of anti-Christian books following the Great Persecution, neglect of ancient books and possibly the magic trials in Antioch in the 370s and the subsequent destruction of private libraries. Nevertheless, the assumption that John was alluding specifically to Porphyry can be supported by a similar passage taken from John's sermons:⁸⁷

I wished, if you had plenty of spare time, to bring before you all the book of a certain impure Greek philosopher written against us, and that of another of earlier date, in order to arouse you at least, and to lead you away from your exceeding laziness. For if *they* were so wakeful to speak against us, what excuse can we deserve, if we do not even know how to refute the attacks against us?

It is likely that one of these Greek philosophers was Porphyry and John explicitly justifies the fact that his writings were preserved by some Christians in that they needed to give well-informed counter-arguments against pagans. The other, much older author was probably Celsus, who wrote a treatise against Christianity in the second century.

Another interesting aspect in this passage by John Chrysostom is his derision of philosophical opinions that are contrary to Christianity as we have seen that he describes the philosophical tradition as laughter. John thus uses the derision of texts and their authors as an effective weapon to cast doubt on a book's worthiness.

This motif has a tradition in ancient rhetoric. As Quintilian wrote in the first century, "we laugh not merely at those words or actions which are astute or hilarious, but also at those which are stupid, hot-tempered or shy. The motivation for this is therefore ambiguous, since laughter is never far away from derision."⁸⁸ In Greek philosophy derision was occasionally used as a rhetorical tool. The atomist philosopher Democritus, for example, was known as the laughing phi-

⁸⁷ Chrys. *hom. 17 in Jo. 4* (PG 59:113): ἐβουλόμην, εἴ γε σχολῆς ἀπελαύετε πολλῆς, εἰς μέσον πάντων ὑμῶν μιαροῦ τινος Ἑλληνος φιλοσόφου βιβλίον καθ' ἡμῶν εἰρημένον ἀγαγεῖν, ἕτερου πάλιν πρεσβυτέρου τούτου, ἵν' οὕτω γοῦν ὑμᾶς διανέστησα, καὶ τῆς πολλῆς νωθείας ἀπήγαγον. εἰ γὰρ ἐκείνοι μὲν, ὥστε καθ' ἡμῶν εἰπεῖν, τοσαῦτα ἡγρύπνησαν, τίνος ἂν εἶημεν συγγνώμης ἡμεῖς ἄξιοι, εἰ μὴδὲ τὰς προσβολὰς τὰς καθ' ἡμῶν εἰσόμεθα ἀποκρούεσθαι;

⁸⁸ Quint. *inst. 6.3.7*: *neque enim acute tantum ac venuste, sed stulte, iracunde, timide dicta ac facta ridetur, ideoque anceps eius rei ratio est, quod a derisu non procul abest risus.*

losopher, apparently because of his derisory attitude towards his fellow citizens, and was therefore in turn derided.⁸⁹ This specific case may have served as a precedent for the derision of philosophy in Christian texts. In this specific connotation laughter has the purpose of proving other opinions to be wrong and not worthy of refutation. This can in turn imply that among those who shared this attitude there was an unwillingness to include the content of the derided philosophies in writing. For example, Plato has been cited not to have ever mentioned Democritus in his works.⁹⁰

John Chrysostom uses the metaphor of laughter particularly often not just with regard to pagan philosophy, but also with regard to paganism as a whole. In doing so, he combines this motif with medical metaphors. For example, in the immediate context of the passage quoted above from the *Discourse on Babylas* he compares the termination of Hellenism to the gradual perishment of a body infected with long-lasting putrefaction (13):⁹¹

If this satanic laughter has not been completely deleted from the earth, what has already happened is sufficient to convince you concerning the future. Because the greater part has been destroyed in such a short amount of time, no one will rival us any longer on account of the remainder. [...] Paganism had been spread all over the earth and possessed the souls of all human beings and so much later, after so much force and progress, was it destroyed by the power of Christ.

John's commemoration of the Great Persecution probably caused him to ridicule ancient philosophies in response to those philosophers (like Porphyry) who ridiculed Christianity. A striking example of this theme can be quoted from the second *Homily to the Gospel of John*:⁹²

⁸⁹ See Pellizer (2000).

⁹⁰ D.L. *Democritus* 40.

⁹¹ Chrys. *pan. Bab.* 2.13–15 (SC 362:108–10): ὥστε εἰ καὶ μὴ τέλεον ὁ σατανικὸς οὗτος ἐξήλειπται γέλωσ ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, ἀλλ' ἱκανὰ γε τὰ ἤδη γεγόμενα πιστώσασθαι καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν μελλόντων ὑμᾶς. τοῦ γὰρ πλείονος καθαιρεθέντος ἐν οὕτῳ χρόνῳ βραχεῖ περὶ τοῦ λειπομένου οὐδεὶς φιλονεικήσει λοιπόν. ... ὁ μὲν γὰρ Ἑλληνισμὸς πανταχοῦ τῆς γῆς ἐκταθεὶς καὶ τὰς ἀπάντων ἀνθρώπων ψυχὰς κατασχὼν οὕτως ὕστερον μετὰ τὴν τοσαύτην ἰσχὺν καὶ τὴν ἐπίδοσιν ὑπὸ τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ κατελύθη δυνάμει.

⁹² Chrys. *hom. 2 in Jo.* 2 (PG 59:30–31): τούτων γὰρ ἓνια ἐζήτησαν μὲν οἱ περὶ Πλάτωνα καὶ Πυθαγόραν· τῶν γὰρ ἄλλων οὐδὲ ἀπλῶς μνημονευτέον ἡμῖν φιλοσόφων· οὕτω καταγέλαστοι ἐντεῦθεν μεθ' ὑπερβολῆς γεγονάσιν ἅπαντες. οἱ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων θαυμασθέντες πλέον παρ' αὐτοῖς, καὶ πιστευθέντες εἶναι κορυφαῖοι τῆς ἐπιστήμης ἐκείνης, οὔτοι μάλιστα τῶν ἄλλων εἰσὶν· οἱ καὶ πολιτείας μὲν ἕνεκεν καὶ νόμων συνθέντες τινὰ ἔγραψαν· ὅμως δὲ ἐν ἅπασι παίδων αἰσχροτέρων κατεγέλασθησαν. Cf. Maxwell (2006), 35.

The followers of Plato and Pythagoras investigated some of these questions. There is simply no need for us to remember the other philosophers; they have now all become so excessively ridiculous; and those who have been more admired among them than the rest and who have been believed to be the experts in that science, are so more than the others; and they have written compositions on the subject of the state and the laws, and in all have been derided more shamefully than children.

John's verdict on these unnamed philosophers is founded on their diversity of opinions which conflict with Christianity's unified vision. By contrast, "they have erred a great error, and, like blind or drunken people, have dashed against each other in their error."⁹³ Moreover, just like the pagans had generally derided the folly of the message of the cross in the beginning, so are now pagan world views derided as madness by Christian authors.⁹⁴ In consequence, John passed over other philosophical traditions than those of the Platonists and Pythagoreans (which were close to each other) in the context of the above passage.

Borrowing from Christian and Platonic traditions and constituting another recurrent theme in Christian authors, their ridiculousness is closely linked to "children" as a periphrase for Greek philosophers, as well as to the devil, both here and in the passage quoted above.⁹⁵ Within this theme, John singles out philosophical traditions on the transmigration of souls and in particular the Pythagorean belief that souls transmigrated into plants, ridiculing both vegetarianism and the notion that human beings are a species of animals as inconsistent with the Christian belief in creation.⁹⁶

It is a common theme of Christian authors to name the old philosophers "children", implying that the Judaeo-Christian tradition is older than, and superior to, Greek philosophy and religion. Thus, Cyril of Alexandria provides a doubtful, circumstantial account comparing the Jewish and Greek traditions up to the birth of Christ based on the Olympic calendar.⁹⁷ From this he derives his claim that Christian tradition is older than Greek literacy⁹⁸ and that the Greek philosophers had borrowed anything that might be construed as truth

⁹³ Chrys. *hom.* 2 in *Jo.* 2 (PG 59:31): καὶ καθάπερ τυφλοὶ καὶ μεθύοντες, καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ πλάνῃ ἀλλήλοις προσέρρηξαν.

⁹⁴ This argument is clearly put forward in Chrys. *hom.* 4 in 1 *Cor.* 1 (PG 61:29–30).

⁹⁵ Thus in Chrys. *hom.* 4 in *Ac.* 4 (PG 60:49); *hom.* 2 in *Jo.* 3 (PG 59:32–3); *hom.* 4 in 1 *Cor.* 6 (PG 61:38–9).

⁹⁶ Chrys. *hom.* 4 in *Ac.* 4 (PG 60:48–9). Throughout the Middle Ages, Christian scholars condemned metempsychosis: Maaz (1998).

⁹⁷ Cyr. *Juln.* 1.5–16 (= PG 76:513C–524A). Chapterisation for the first two books according to the edition by Burguière and Éviex as well as for the first five books according to the most recent edition, GCS NF 20. I give the PG references in addition.

⁹⁸ Cyr. *Juln.* 1.19 (= PG 76:525A).

from the Christian tradition.⁹⁹ He refers to Solon's saying in Plato's *Timaeus* that "you Greeks are always children" because they have no written record so far as evidence of their limited abilities.¹⁰⁰ For Cyril, the line was clear: whenever the Greek sages had agreed with Christian scripture, they had also agreed among each other, inspired by God, whereas in anything else they had been of dissenting, abominable opinions, and in a state of delirium.¹⁰¹ In making this point, Cyril adds some biblical quotations and allusions,¹⁰² noting, for example, that it was only after the Great Flood, the tower of Babel, and the confusion of languages that men were brought to worship that which is created, such as the sky, sun, moon and elements, instead of the one God.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, John Chrysostom occasionally admits that philosophical writings disagreeing with the Christian world view were still accessible. For example, in the nineteenth *Homily against the Statues*, written after the Statue Riot, John says that, although it can hardly be found any more, the folly of the philosophers is evident if one unfolds their book-scrolls written long ago.¹⁰⁴ In these, the reader is offered the opinions that there is no divine providence and no creation, opinions that are opposed to Christian teaching and that John finds "most ridiculous."¹⁰⁵ This passage implies that it was at that time still possible to read the opinions of the old philosophers.

In a sermon on the Gospel of John, John Chrysostom reiterates his point that philosophical writings can at best be found in the possession of Christians, echoing the passage on the disappearance of books in the *Discourse on Babylas*. John argues that on the one hand, educated Christians just as John himself might still find it useful to study ancient philosophy to improve their own writings, but on the other they should disclose their knowledge only to ridicule philosophy. By

99 Cyr. *Juln.* 1.17 (= PG 76:524A–B).

100 Cyr. *Juln.* 1.18 (= PG 76:524D): "Ἕλληνες ἐστε παῖδες αἰεί.

101 Cyr. *Juln.* 1.20 (= PG 76:525C).

102 Cyr. *Juln.* 1.20 (= PG 76:525D).

103 Cyr. *Juln.* 1.21 (= PG 76:528A).

104 Chrys. *stat.* 19.1 (PG 49:189): κἂν ἕνα αὐτῶν λαβὼν φιλόσοφόν τινα τῶν ἔξωθεν ἀγάγῃς εἰς μέσον νῦν· μᾶλλον δὲ νῦν μὲν οὐδένα ἔστιν εὐρεῖν· ἂν δὲ τινα τούτων λαβὼν, καὶ τὰ βιβλία τῶν πάλαι παρ' αὐτοῖς φιλοσοφησάντων ἀναπτύξας ἐπέλθῃς, καὶ τί μὲν οὗτοι ἀποκρίνονται νῦν, τί δὲ ἐκεῖνοι τότε ἐφιλοσόφησαν παράλληλα θεῖς ἐξετάσῃς, ὅψει πόση μὲν ἢ τούτων σοφία, πόση δὲ ἢ ἐκείνων ἄνοια.

105 Chrys. *stat.* 19.1 (PG 49:189–90): καταγελαστότερα; cf. *in illud, Paulus vocatus. et de mutat. nominum* 4.5 (PG 51:152–3).

contrast, he suggests that the less educated audience is discouraged to study pagan philosophy at all:¹⁰⁶

But enough of this; or rather even this is out of measure. For in order to learn anything useful from these authors, it would be necessary to waste even more time; but just in order to observe their awkwardness and ridiculousness, more than enough has been said by us already.

This passage explains why John repeatedly calls ancient philosophy ridiculous while finding it necessary to protect the faith from philosophical counter-arguments. His choice between the two positions depended on the degree of education that he expected from his audience.

Further allusions to the burning of books during the Great Persecution are found among Prudentius' poems (early fifth century), which include a collection of martyr hymns (*Peristephanon*). Originally from Spain, Prudentius eventually had a prestigious if not specified office at the court of Theodosius (379–395)¹⁰⁷ and it is likely that he had lived in Rome for some time.¹⁰⁸ Before giving a closer reading of the Vincent hymn, I shall discuss a late antique mosaic that is probably based on this hymn and that alludes to book-burning during the Great Persecution.

A lunette on the south wall opposite the entrance of the imperial mausoleum of the Theodosian family (built c. 430–450) depicts a saint traditionally interpreted as the martyr Lawrence.¹⁰⁹ Lawrence ultimately became the patron saint of both librarians and fire – a peculiar combination. The mausoleum is attributed to Honorius' sister, Galla Placidia (d. 450) – probably the construction's patron – and was built in the backyard of San Vitale Basilica with its famous mosaics of Justinian and Theodora. Some scholars have interpreted the mosaic as showing a saint burning heretical books and the chapel interior as a whole to depict the dissemination of the gospels,¹¹⁰ leading one scholar to suggest that

106 Chrys. *hom. 2 in Jo. 3* (PG 59:33): ἀλλὰ τούτων μὲν ἄλις· μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ταῦτα πέρα τοῦ μέτρου. εἰ μὲν γάρ τι χρήσιμον παρ' αὐτῶν ἦν μαθεῖν, ἔδει καὶ πλέον ἐνδιατρίβειν· εἰ δὲ ὅσον τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην αὐτῶν καὶ τὸν γέλωτα κατοπτεῦσαι, καὶ ταῦτα πλέον τοῦ δέοντος εἴρηται παρ' ἡμῶν. Cf. *hom. 10 in Ac. 4* (PG 60:91).

107 Prud. *praef.* 13–21.

108 Tränkle (1999), 106, note 43 provides a list of scholarly contributions that argue in favour of 401–3; thus also Harries (1984), 71–3; Tränkle suggests 395.

109 On the identification with Lawrence: Deichmann (1976), 63, 75; on the date, p. 66; Lowden (1997), 108–11.

110 Strzykowski (1915), 93; Bovini (1957), 11; Diehl (1886), 30; Cabrol and Leclercq (1924), 273; *livre, sans doute hérétique*.

the scene generally refers to the destruction of ancient literature by flame.¹¹¹ Arguing against the book-burning interpretation, others have suggested that the parchment codex carried by the saint in the depiction is a gospel or another Christian book.¹¹² However, that the cabinet already shows four gospels, each with its title given, indicates that the fifth book, that of the saint, is different from the gospels, because no title is given.



Figure 1. Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, mosaic of “St Lawrence”
Photo: Nadine Urbschat

Early attempts by scholarship to relate the scene to Prudentius’ Lawrence hymn (*Perist.* 2) have been critically received.¹¹³ The arrangement of the mosaic departs from the traditions established by other Lawrence images. Mackie has therefore suggested that the mosaic was an illustration of Prudentius’ Vincent hymn.¹¹⁴ I agree with this view also because in the Vincent poem, as I will show, the Spanish martyr is forced to disclose the sacred writings to be burnt. Both poems have several elements in common, including the gridiron, as has

¹¹¹ Antoniadès (1936), 225–6.

¹¹² Nordström (1953), 16; Deichmann (1976), 76. Others have interpreted the saint as Christ holding the books of human records on Judgment Day: Bovini (1957), 7–8, 11.

¹¹³ Dütschke (1909), 269–72; See Courcelle (1948), on attempts in favour of the Lawrence hypothesis.

¹¹⁴ Mackie (2002), 175, 188–9; Mackie (1990).

been shown by Desantis.¹¹⁵ This alignment of the mosaic with Vincent rather than with Lawrence therefore supports those scholars who have argued that the mosaic alludes to book-burning.

The west and east lunettes have deer drinking the water of eternal life. Above the lunettes, there are arches supposedly showing eight apostles as well as doves again drinking from a vessel or fountain. Yet the book is central to the scene as a whole. The bases of the cross arches have vine scrolls, taking up a motif that we will see again in *Contra Symmachum* and other poems by Prudentius in section 3.3. To Mackie “the acanthus represents the unbroken tie with classical tradition.”¹¹⁶ The apostles also carry book scrolls. While vine tendrils are common even in Roman pre-Christian mosaics, scholars have nevertheless persuasively linked the reception forwarded in the mausoleum to the parable of the vine and the branches in the Gospel of John (15:1).¹¹⁷ I would like to add that this is supported by a fifth-century codex of Pliny’s letters that contains a subscription “enclosed by scrolls of vine-tendrils” (CLA 1660). This archaeological find shows that this symbol was actually employed as ornamentation for classical books. It is also worth noting that the opposite lunette shows Christ the Good Shepherd protecting his flock of sheep. This indicates that the whole imagery represents the protection of the Christian congregation from evil. This weight of established interpretation suggests that the scene subtly alludes to book-burning in the same way that Prudentius’ martyr accounts do, as I will argue shortly.

The historical setting of Prudentius’ Vincent hymn shows its link to book-burning as it is situated during the Great Persecution.¹¹⁸ In Prudentius’ hymn, Vincent, the martyr, is tortured after he denied offering sacrifices to the emperor. However, he mocks his torturers. The torturer, Datianus, who was governor of Spain,¹¹⁹ demands Vincent to surrender his books: “At least reveal your concealed pages, your hidden books, that the teaching which disseminates falsity may be burned with the fire it deserves.”¹²⁰ The martyr replies with what at first glance seems to be the judge’s consignment to hell:¹²¹

115 Desantis (2000), 448.

116 Mackie (2002), 182; cf. Apoc. 14:18–20.

117 Bovini (1957), 10.

118 On a prose version of a date unknown, Simonetti (1956); Palmer (1989), 245–6.

119 Prud. *perist.* 5.40; *PLRE* 1, Datianus 2, 244.

120 Prud. *perist.* 5.181–4: *saltem latentes paginas | librosque opertos detege, | quo secta pravam seminans | iustis cremetur ignibus.*

121 Prud. *perist.* 5.186–92: *quem tu, maligne, mysticis | minitaris ignem litteris, | flagrabis ipse hoc iustius. | romphaea nam caelestium | vindex erit voluminum | tanti veneni interpretem | linguam peruens fulmine.*

You yourself will burn more deservedly in the fire with which you are viciously threatening our mystic writings, for the sword will retaliate our heavenly books, burning with its lightning-flash the tongue that speaks such poison.

This passage again shows the close association of book-burning and the burning of the human body. The “tongue” (*lingua*) may also be translated in a figurative sense as “language” or “speech.” I here agree with those scholars who have argued that from a comparison of the hymns on Cyprian and on Romanus *lingua* can also be a metonymy for written record.¹²² This metonymy fits into my later reading of it meaning wicked tongue, a metaphor for anti-Christian ideas expressed either in writing or in speech, as I shall show in section 3.3. I shall also show the use of “poison” as a synonym for false philosophy and heresy. While this passage can be aligned with Prudentius’ claim that Christianity had overcome the errors of the past, it is also possible to read this passage as proposing that certain pagan books have been or needed to be burnt. Nor is it a stretch of interpretation to suggest that this may have been proposed as a retaliatory response to the burning of Christian books during the Great Persecution.

The *Passion of Philipp* has a similar scene of divine revenge for the burning of divine Scripture in Heraclea in Thrace. It has a polemical thrust against the *forum* that the philosophers used to roam:¹²³

A fire was made in the presence even of the citizens and foreigners that were gathered together, and he threw all divine scriptures into the blaze. Suddenly a flame ascended up to heaven so powerful that fear detained individual spectators from looking at such a fire. Some, however, were sitting around blessed Philipp in the forum, where everything is for

122 Malamud (1989), 117–20. Roberts (1993), 123 note 22: “the conflation of language derived from the martyr cult with the traditional pagan claims for the survival of works of literature.” Mastrangelo (2008), 1: “In the work of Prudentius, *lingua* stands for poetry (*Cath.* 3.94) and the correct faith (*catholicam linguam*, *Apoth.* 2), which must be disseminated through writing, speaking, and singing.”

123 *Pass. Philippi* 5.4–10 (Franchi de’ Cavalieri, 144–5): *igne subposito, adstantibus etiam civibus peregrinisque collectis, scripturas omnes divinas in medium misit incendium. tanta subito ad caelum flamma praecessit, ut stantes singulos formido ab spectaculo tanti ignis arceret. quidam vero circa beatum Philippum in foro sedebant, ubi venale quodcumque proponitur. ad quos cum pervenisset hic nuntius, praesentibus exponebat dicens: ‘viri qui Heracleam incolitis, Iudaei, pagani vel cuiusque religionis aut sectae, iam nunc extremi temporis, futura cognoscite, Paulo apostolo commonente, qui dixit: revelatur enim ira Dei de caelo super omnem impietatem et iniustitiam hominum. et in Sodomis ideo venit ira iusta propter iniustitias eorum, ut si Sodomorum timeant iudicium et iniustitiam fugiant et quaerentes qui sit qui hoc fecit iudicium, ad eum convertantur ex vanis lapidibus et sint salvi. quare his, quibus per Orientem in Sodomis ignis apparuit, signum iudicii et indicium fuit irae caelestis. ac ne in solo Oriente pius se ignis ostenderet, in Sicilia quoque atque in Italia visa est res digna miraculo’*; Speyer (1981), 35; cf. Just. 1 *apol.* 53.

the sale. The messenger [Philipp] came to them and explained to those in his presence: People of Heraclea, Jews, and pagans, followers of every religion or sect, be aware of the future, now that the end of time is near! The apostle Paul has warned us: 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men' [Rom. 1:18]. Therefore, righteous anger comes to Sodom because of their unrighteousness: if they fear the judgment on the people of Sodom, if they abstain from their unrighteousness and search for Him who made this judgment, they will convert to Him and be saved from their vain snares. Therefore, it has been a sign of the judgment and a witness of the divine anger to the people throughout the East to whom appeared the fire in Sodom. And the pious fire arose not only in the East, but also in Sicily and in Italy there was seen something worthy to be called a miracle.

The Passion was originally written in Greek and has survived in revised Latin translations, although not without alteration. The modern editor Franchi de' Cavalieri suggests that the text was first penned in the first quarter of the fourth century and that a later hand probably added to the eschatological passage quoted above. He also argues that it is likely that the passage's end was written after temples such as the Serapeum in Alexandria had been destroyed – adding weight and meaning to these sections. Confirming this, the phrase "in Italy" is missing in one old manuscript.¹²⁴ It is likely that this is a similarly later addition, meaning that the phrase perhaps alludes to Christian book-burning in Western parts of the Roman Empire, justifying this action as retaliation for the burning of Christian books. At any rate, texts like these convey a message that Christianity had overcome the errors of the past.

A similar scene can be found in another of Prudentius' martyr hymn, related to the martyr Romanus and situated in Antioch during the Great Persecution. The passion of Romanus again shows close association between the book and the body as it is striking that the torturer orders Romanus to be burnt: "You are condemned to be devoured by fire and you will soon turn into a scant ash heap."¹²⁵ While a monstrous pyre is being built up and the flame fed with dried grass, the martyr himself, just like in the scene of book-burning in the Vincent hymn, is positive that this judgment actually pertains only to an event of future times: "This kind of passion is not assigned to me, and a great miracle still remains to happen."¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Note agiografiche* 9, 80–85.

¹²⁵ Prud. *perist.* 10.814–15: *ignibus vorabere | damnatus et favilla iam tenuis fies.*

¹²⁶ Prud. *perist.* 10.854–5: *nec passionis hoc genus datum est | et restat ingens quod fiat miraculum.*

Some Martyr Acts of the fifth and sixth centuries still commemorate the burning of Christian scripture during the persecution in Italy¹²⁷ and in the East.¹²⁸ One such text reports that pagan priests burnt the books “of their own idols”, overcome by the martyr’s steadfastness.¹²⁹ The historical credibility of these texts is doubtful, but they indicate that such memories sustained long after. For example, the *Coptic Martyrdom of Victor* also depicts a “magician” who came to burn his “magic” books and to convert to Christianity. This unnamed “magician” had prepared poison to execute the martyr Victor of Antioch in a trial in the age of Diocletian but saw his powers defeated.¹³⁰ Just before his death, Victor prophesied that eight years later all philosophers and orators will die when they meet for lunch in a house that will fall down.¹³¹ This appears to be an allusion to the destruction of temples such as the Serapeum of Alexandria. A medieval Latin Martyr Act locates a similar story in Spain around the same time.¹³² We can see again that Christian Martyr Acts link book-burning during the Great Persecution to the death of memory as far as magic or inimical philosophical traditions are concerned.

In sum, a number of Christian authors demonised pagan philosophy because, they argued, some philosophers had advised emperors such as Diocletian to persecute Christians. Philosophers and their texts and teachings were therefore portrayed as enemies of Christianity and as demons able to destroy the souls of the faithful and to drag them into hell. Authors such as Lactantius and Eusebius acted as advisors of the emperor Constantine and therefore appear to have influenced the censorship legislation of that time, just as philosophers like Porphyry had informed the decision of the emperor Diocletian to destroy Christian texts. In the next section, we will see that Constantine’s successors continued to curb specific pagan forms of magic and divination, although their intent was to battle oppositional forces and stabilise their dynasty, and that the

127 *Pass. Alexandri* 14 (*ActaSS Sept.* 6:234): *gesta nostra secretius habe, quoniam tempus malum est*; *Pass. S. Victoris Mauri* 6 (*ActaSS Maii* 2:290): in Milan; *Pass. Firmi* 9 (*ActaSS Aug.* 2:421): *omnia scripta vel gesta Christianorum*, in Verona; *Pass. Gordii Caesariensis Cappadoc.* 2 (van Esbroeck, 379).

128 Kynopolis in Egypt: *Pass. Dioscori* (Quentin, 329); Abitinae: *Pass. Saturnini* 12.14–15 (Franchi de’ Cavalieri, 58–62); *Pass. Gordii Caesariensis Cappadoc.* 2 (van Esbroeck, 379).

129 *Pass. Paphnut. et soc.* 17 (Delehay, 337): οἱ δὲ ἱερεῖς θεασάμενοι τὸ βιβλίον τῶν εἰδώλων αὐτῶν καίόμενον.

130 *Martyrium Victoris* 4 Fol. 22b (Budge, 38/291).

131 *Martyrium Victoris* 4 Fol. 25a–b (Budge, 43/296).

132 *Pass. Facundi et Primitivi* 13–14 (Fábrega Grau 2:52): *maleficus omnes codices suos in igne combusit* (14).

emperor Julian's short-lived attempt to revive a specific form of pagan higher education led to further reactions by Christian authors keen to reverse just this.

1.5 Julian and the Constantinian Dynasty

Constantine's sons, Constantius II (337–361) and Constans I (337–350), continued to favour Christianity. Zealous Christians, such as monks, destroyed temples, although a law forbade this practice, and it was perhaps not before 356 that sacrifices and worship of images were banned by threat of capital punishment.¹³³ It is not clear to what extent these laws were implemented, and paganism continued long after.

The anti-pagan legislation under Constantine's successors ruled against certain aspects of paganism perceived to be dangerous rather than against paganism *per se*. Nevertheless, these early religious laws paved the way to later book-burning laws and reported acts of book-burning. In 357, Constantius issued an edict to the people of Rome, banning all kinds of divination. He visited Rome in that year. Under the threat of capital punishment it was forbidden for anyone to consult persons involved in this art, including astrologers (*mathematici*), prophets (*vates*) and representatives of the old Greco-Roman religion involved in divination.¹³⁴ It is possible that Constantine reacted to slanderous rumours about his reign, as some emperors did in the first century. It is clear that this kind of divination would have attracted the most attention. Nevertheless, the link between paganism and divination must have been welcome to the clergy. Thus, the council of Ancyra in 314 had defined the act of divination as “being in accordance with the customs of the pagans.”¹³⁵

Around the same time, a further law by Constantius, addressed to the people of Rome, condemned those who practiced the magic arts (*magicae artes*). Exemptions from torture, traditionally enjoyed by persons from the upper strata of society, were waived in cases of *magi*, who “are to be regarded as enemies of humankind” as well as anyone involved in divination “including even a *mathematicus*.”¹³⁶ This explains why according to Ammianus people of high

133 *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.6 (law by Constantius and Julian in Milan). Constantine may have ruled against sacrifices (*Cod. Theod.* 16.10.2 alludes to this, however, without the threat of capital punishment), but this is debated; see recently Wallraff (2011), 9–10.

134 *Cod. Theod.* 9.16.4.

135 *C Anc. can.* 23 (Mansi 2:534): *auguria vel auspicia, sive somnia vel divinationes quaslibet, secundum morem gentilium.*

136 *Cod. Theod.* 9.16.5–6, at 6: *humani generis inimici credendi sunt ... vel etiam mathematicus.*

rank were tortured during the magic trials in the 370s, as we will see in section 2.1. With a reference to his father Constantine, Constantius also ruled pamphlets (*famosi libelli*) to be burnt. It therefore appears that the problem of slanderous writings continued in Africa.¹³⁷

There is evidence that on at least one occasion Constantius enforced these laws, albeit in a different region. In 359, Constantius conducted trials in reaction to offensive scriptures maliciously forwarded to him from the temple-archive of the Egyptian Bes at Abydos. The main location and focus for this investigation, which involved torture regardless of rank, was Scythopolis in Palestine (between Antioch and Alexandria). Ammianus mentions a philosopher and a learned poet, who was later acquitted, among the victims.¹³⁸ His account suggests that prophecies on the fate of the emperor were particularly unwanted, but that it was ultimately the decision of the prosecutor to punish any form of pagan divination.

Constantius' successor Julian (361–363) was the only acknowledged pagan emperor since Constantine. His Christian adversaries charged him with apostasy. Much has been written about Julian's psychological development, his intellectual and educational background, and what inspired the emperor to turn from Christianity to the previous state cult. It is worth looking in more detail at exactly what the last pagan emperor contributed to the narrative of censorship and book-burning we have established so far as well as at the legal and psychological consequences of Julian's religious policy in the years following his death.

Firstly, the so-called teacher edict certainly is the best known of Julian's laws. It is generally interpreted as representing Julian's intention to put Christian teachers out of business. The edict puts the local decurions in charge of granting teaching licenses to regulate these standards and in reaching the standard reading of it, much has been made out of Julian's letters. For Julian, moral integrity meant that a teachers' religious belief had to be commensurate with the pedagogical material he used.¹³⁹ As a result, the academic conclusion is that Julian barred Christians from teaching classical literature, such as Homer, and that he generally intended to exclude Christians from higher education. Nevertheless, at least one scholar suggested the alternative interpretation that the teacher edict was part of a general program to improve the administrative and moral *status quo* of the empire rather than to discriminate against Christians.¹⁴⁰ This, I feel, is a more persuasive position as the edict mentions only the moral standing of

¹³⁷ *Cod. Theod.* 9.34.5.

¹³⁸ *Amm.* 19.12.

¹³⁹ *Cod. Theod.* 13.3.5; *Jul. ep.* 61c (Bidez 1.2:73–5).

¹⁴⁰ Klein (1981).

teachers (grammarians and rhetoricians). It seems that because the edict was worded neutrally, it was included in the *Codex Theodosianus*, despite its possible anti-Christian tendency. Watts has recently argued that as a consequence of this edict pagan teachers were in turn those who had to face adversities in their profession, once emperors continued to be Christians.¹⁴¹

From all the legislative acts Julian undertook none was despised more by Greek Christian authors than his teacher edict. We will see in the following section that Christian authors leave no doubt that they counted the late emperor among the persecutors, although the evidence suggests that he avoided religious trials. In this context, Speyer's remark that Julian was close to the Christian theologians that criticised him is intriguing.¹⁴² After all, had not the earlier apologists insisted that Christians should avoid reading many pagan texts?

Secondly in this context, Julian was suspicious not only of Christian educators but also of certain schools of philosophy, preferring himself Neoplatonic philosophy. What is less known is that although he readmitted philosophers to his court he also argued for censorship. In a letter he stated that pagan priests should not read the poetical works of Archilochus, Hipponax, and the Old Comedy as well as the philosophical works of Epicurus and Pyrrho, adding that most books by the Epicurean and Pyrrhonic philosophers had perished by this time.¹⁴³ While some Neoplatonic philosophers surely shared Julian's view, it must also be noted that his reservations may have been aggravated by his Christian education, as noted above. Judging from established testimonials regarding the edict on teachers, it appears that Julian's religious policy had a psychological impact on some Christians in the years to come, as we will see in the next section.

It also appears that pagans took advantage of the changed religious climate during Julian's reign, going as far as to confiscate books. In Alexandria the Arian bishop George of Cappadocia, a man with the reputation of being a fierce executor of Constantius' II laws against sacrifices and temples was a victim of this. George was one of the multiple replacements for the important theologian Athanasius (who was many times expelled from his bishop's see as an adversary of Arius). As a consequence of his policy, the mob murdered George and his library was plundered during the ensuing riot in 361 when the religious climate had changed following Julian's accession. In reaction to this, Julian ordered Porphyry, Alexandria's finance officer (*rationalis*), and his staff to conduct house

¹⁴¹ Watts (2006) 48–78.

¹⁴² Speyer (1981), 79–80.

¹⁴³ See p. 154, note 12 below.

searches and interrogations to try and recover George's books, suggesting that he would destroy any Christian books among these:¹⁴⁴

Do grant me this private favour, that all of George's books be found out. For he owned many books on philosophy, and many on rhetoric; many also on the teachings of the ungodly Galilaeans [= Christians]. These latter I wished to be obliterated, but for fear that along with them more useful works may be taken away, let all those also be carefully searched out.

The letter shows that destruction of specific books could cause larger, coincidental losses of books because the officials in charge of the searches were probably well-educated and may have kept some of the books. Following their initiation, searches for forbidden books and their destruction begin to take place with increasing frequency from this point onwards through the next centuries. I shall argue in the following section that clerical exhortations not to read certain pagan books were sometimes linked to Julian's religious policy.

1.6 Christian Reactions to the Emperor Julian

Julian's works and religious policy provoked similar polemics as the Great Persecution had done. While these polemical discourses have not directly affected imperial censorship legislation, they may to some extent account for clerical interests with regard to the banning of books.

Gregory of Nazianzus composed two orations against Julian (*or.* 4 and 5) in 363 or shortly after, that immediately reacted to Julian's religious policy and death. Gregory heavily attacks Julian for attempting to deprive Christians of literature (*lógoi*) and education through the teacher edict (4.101). As another educated Christian who, like his fellow student Basil, was a connoisseur of classical literature, he argued in his speech that Julian was wrong to claim that pagan literature and religion are connected. He suggested that Christians could endorse pagan culture but dismiss sacrifices (4.5).

Yet in his polemical attacks on Julian, Gregory defended only selected aspects of pagan literature and education and deprecated others. He regarded as morally inferior the kind of pagan education that Julian wanted to be taught

144 Jul. *ep.* 107:378A–B (Bidez 1.2:185): ταύτην οὖν ιδιωτικὴν μοι δὸς τὴν χάριν, ὅπως ἀνευρεθῇ πάντα τὰ Γεωργίου βιβλία. πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ ἦν φιλόσοφα παρ' αὐτῷ, πολλὰ δὲ ῥητορικά, πολλὰ δὲ ἦν καὶ τῆς τῶν δυσσεβῶν Γαλιλαίων διδασκαλίας· ἃ βουλοίμην μὲν ἡφανίσθαι πάντη, τοῦ δὲ μὴ σὺν τούτοις ὑφαιρεθῆναι τὰ χρησιμώτερα, ζητεῖσθω κάκεῖνα μετ' ἀκριβείας ἅπαντα. For the context, Jul. *ep.* 60, 106–7 (Bidez 1.2:69–72, 184–6); Amm. 22.11.5–11.

in schools (4.124): “the education of this world was walking in darkness, and falling away far from the light of truth”,¹⁴⁵ something he suggested was being disseminated by demons (4.55). As with other Christian authors, Gregory was inclusive as he defended the rhetorical use of the Greek language from Julian’s alleged argument that this too was the domain of Hellenism, arguing that Christians should make use of rhetoric if it was to disseminate faith (4.100 – 107). Similarly to other Christian authors, Gregory did not dismiss poetry as such – he himself composed Christian classicizing poems – but he did criticise its pagan content (4.108), such as the myths of the Olympic gods, as being sexually offensive (4.70, 116 – 23). He regarded the gods of pagan poetry as dragons (5.31 – 2). On the subject of philosophy and philosophers, he execrated the philosophers from the various ancient schools who had persuaded Julian to turn away from Christianity (4.43, 72; 5.5, 38, 41), as opposed to the Christian “true” philosophers (such as monks). He linked the learning associated with these pagan philosophers to astrology and divination (4.31, 43) and explicitly counted geometry as superstition (4.109; cf. 4.43) – a derogatory Christian term for pagan belonging. As far as magic books are concerned, Gregory, like Julian, did approve of the unity of pagan religion and overly pagan literature:¹⁴⁶

Put away your books of sorcery and divination, let only those of the Prophets and Apostles be opened [...] Throw down your Triptolemus, and your Eleusis, and your foolish dragons: shame yourself of the books of your oracular Orpheus!

Gregory also discussed the legal background of book offences. He polemically said that the treason law – which ruled the death penalty on personal insult of the emperor – was suitable to ban pagan poetry as it was sexually offensive. Moreover, pagan poetry insulted not only one god – the emperor – but many gods:¹⁴⁷

If death is the penalty assigned by the laws for all who blaspheme against a single one of their gods – even privately and slightly – what should be the punishment for those who let

145 Gr. Naz. or. 4.3 (SC 309:90): τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ... παιδεύσεις ἐν σκότει διαπορευομένη καὶ τοῦ τῆς ἀληθείας φωτὸς πόρρῳ πίπτουσα.

146 Gr. Naz. or. 5.31 (SC 309:354 – 6): παῦσόν σου τὰς γοητικὰς καὶ μαντικὰς βίβλους· αἱ προφητικαὶ δὲ καὶ ἀποστολικάι μόναι ἀνελιττέσθωσαν. ... κατὰβαλε τοὺς Τριπτολέμους σου, καὶ τοὺς Κελεούς, καὶ τοὺς μυστικούς δράκοντας· αἰσχύνθητί ποτε ταῖς τοῦ Θεολόγου σου βίβλοις Ὀρφέως.

147 Gr. Naz. or. 4.118 (SC 309:282): εἰ γὰρ τοῖς εἰς ἓνα θεὸν αὐτῶν καὶ ἰδίᾳ καὶ μικρὰ βλασφημήσας θάνατος ἢ ζημία παρὰ τῶν νόμων, τί πάσχειν ἔδει τοὺς πᾶσιν ὁμοῦ καὶ δημοσίᾳ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς αἰσχίστοις ἐπαφιέντας τὴν ποίησιν, καὶ μακρῷ χρόνῳ παραδόντας τὴν κωμωδίαν;

loose their poetry against all gods altogether, publicly, and in the most abusive terms, and for those who have handed down this comedy for a long time?

Gregory here borrows from Clement of Alexandria, who gave a list of authors that insulted the gods (Menander, Antisthenes, Homer and Euripides).¹⁴⁸ He goes as far as condemning Julian for his school building program (4.111). He is perhaps right to describe certain philosophers – “those who strayed, who worshipped the creature rather than the creator”¹⁴⁹ – as (currently) giving up their previous error, from fear of coercion (5.28): after all, we will see that there is some evidence that Julian’s successor Jovian acted against philosophers.

Gregory also was the first to criticise Julian’s anti-Christian writings, particularly his *Contra Galilaeos* (4.74; 5.41), where Julian posited the link between paganism and classical culture. Gregory ranked these writings alongside Porphyry’s which Constantine ordered to be burnt. Both, he argued, contained the same lies (5.41). Gregory’s position is that of a Christian author who aligned Julian’s anti-Christian policy with the influence of those pagan philosophers who advised Julian. As with those Christian authors who wrote against philosophers like Porphyry in the aftermath of the Great Persecution, Gregory’s speeches underpinned the division between acceptable and unacceptable aspects of pagan learning, indicating that pagan philosophical views disagreeing with the Christian world view were detrimental to the well-being of Christians, going as far as to compare Julian’s religious policy with earlier persecutions of Christians. Gregory’s position here certainly has to be seen within the context of the atmosphere soon after Julian’s death and the specific expectations of his audience.

Julian’s religious policy and his works, particularly his treatise *Contra Galilaeos* (that is Christians), frequently provoked Christian criticism even long after his death. Fragments of this work by Julian (361–363) are extant largely because of quotations in a later refutation by the Christian author Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria (412–444). Julian’s work is thus among the very few surviving philosophical texts of Antiquity which undertake a comprehensive refutation of Christianity, arguing, for example, against the biblical concept of creation.

A Coptic Church history has provided an account of the reasons why Cyril wrote his refutation, indicating that Julian’s work was actively suppressed. It notes that a group of philosophers talked with Cyril about Julian’s work. In reaction, Cyril conducted a search for Julian’s writings and, after a long time had

¹⁴⁸ Clem. prot. 7.75.

¹⁴⁹ Gr. Naz. or. 5.28 (SC 309:350): ἐμακρύνθησαν καὶ “ἐλάτρευσαν τῇ κτίσει παρὰ τὸν κτίσαντα”, referring to Rom. 1:25.

passed, eventually found copies. The difficulties Cyril experienced in this search suggests that the work had been suppressed probably because of Christian restrictions: it is named alongside the books of Origen (at that time heretical) and of Porphyry, whose work *Against the Christians* had been ordered to be destroyed in imperial legislation.¹⁵⁰

Outwith of its character as an anti-Christian work, there is evidence to suggest that ecclesiastical authorities criticised Julian's *Contra Galilaeos* for its conflation of Neoplatonic and Epicurean concepts. To Julian's assertion "that the nature of earthly bodies is produced from the clash of the elements" in his refutation *Contra Julianum* Cyril replies that the emperor was influenced by those who informed him, in particular by Empedocles, whom he quotes from a reference in Plotinus.¹⁵¹ To Cyril, such tenets are "laughter" and "sophistries" and they detract from truth,¹⁵² as they had been shown before to be childish talk proposing the most extreme absurdness.¹⁵³ This shows that Julian produced atomistic arguments to challenge the biblical creation account.

1.7 Conclusion

In sum, I have argued in this chapter that two pagan emperors introduced censorship legislation as a tool to establish a greater degree of state control. Christian authors responded to both key events, arguing that their philosophical background, education or advice by contemporary philosophers had caused Diocletian and Julian to legislate in this way. In consequence they came up with a number of strategies to argue that pagan philosophies are demonical, ridiculous, sinful and arrogant curiosity, that philosophy itself had persecuted Christians.

While there is evidence that some Roman emperors of the first century AD occasionally banned astrologers (and even philosophers) from Rome and Italy, there is no firm evidence that books were burnt in these contexts before the late-imperial period. On the contrary, pagan emperors were often advised by philosophers. Indeed, prominent philosophers wrote anti-Christian treatises at the occasion of the Great Persecution in the early fourth century. Contemporary and later Christian polemical texts and Martyr Acts blamed the Great Persecution and the burning of scripture not only on a pagan empire, but also on philoso-

150 *Historia ecclesiae Alexandrinae* (Orlandi 1:77–9).

151 Cyr. *Juln.* 2.46 (= PG 76:604B).

152 Cyr. *Juln.* 2.49 (= PG 76:605C): γέλως ... τερθρεία.

153 Cyr. *Juln.* 2.49 (= PG 76:605B).

phers, notably Porphyry. These Christian authors constructed their discourse on book-burning against the backdrop of the Great Persecution. At that time Christian authors had also agreed on a discourse of condemning natural philosophy based on its contradictions of the biblical creation account.¹⁵⁴

It is likely that Christian apologists such as Lactantius and Eusebius influenced the emperor Constantine who ordered further book-searches soon after the Great Persecution, including searches for books by Porphyry and an unspecified range of forbidden arts. It is also likely that the clergy endorsed Constantine's religious policy. In the next chapter I shall argue that the Roman administration tried to negotiate between these positions. In doing so, the emperors continued to be interested in implementing a greater degree of state control.

¹⁵⁴ See Schmid (1962), 772.

2 Fahrenheit AD 451 – Imperial Legislation and Public Authority

In this chapter, I shall continue to investigate those forms of book-burning and censorship that were sanctioned or tolerated by the Roman authorities. This aspect is in some respects close to a modern understanding of book-burning as a form of government sanctioned censorship. However, when emperors drafted laws, they usually did so in response to embassies or acute problems. There was no systematic plan, on part of the Roman government, to ban certain genres of texts. Imperial censorship laws may have been promulgated as a means of social control or as efforts to manage existing conflicts. Compounding this, ancient Church historians seem to have had little specific knowledge on religious laws issued in the age of Theodosius.¹ That such laws were often repeated and sanctions needed to be imposed on authorities that were not willing to enforce these laws suggests that it took centuries to implant them.² This is because neither provincial nor urban administrations had the staff to implement religious laws. On the other hand, inscriptions from the Roman imperial period indicate that the name of bad emperors were widely eradicated, following their *damnatio memoriae*, but it is unknown to us how this and the destruction or mutilation of their statues could be achieved in the ancient world. On the balance of probability, it is safe to say that while religious laws were therefore not systematically enforced, they did acknowledge general tendencies of their time and area.

Nevertheless, Fögen's German-language study on "the dispossession of the fortune-tellers" argued that the laws collected in the *Codex Theodosianus* indicated that the Christian emperors of Late Antiquity prohibited entire genres of knowledge. In doing so, they contributed to a new sociology of knowledge based on the concept that there was only Christian truth that remained dominant for centuries.³ This reading and subject has received little attention outside of legal history, partly because the efficiency of imperial laws is often doubted.⁴ Lotz recently scrutinised Fögen's view on the *Magiekonflikt*, agreeing that the legal term magician was often interchanged with or used in place of the designation pagan.⁵ Although Lotz saw linguistic parallels between late antique

¹ Errington (1997), 398–443.

² Provincial governors: *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.4. Judges and local magistrates: *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.10; 16.10.11; 16.10.12.4; 16.10.13.1; 16.10.18.3.

³ Fögen (1993). And see Freeman (2008), 140–56.

⁴ Robinson (2007), 130–57.

⁵ Lotz (2005), 98–9, 250.

legal language and the terminology used by the fathers of the Church, she did not explore and explicate the two source genres.⁶ Hermanowicz, on the other hand, has argued that clerical embassies in North Africa have directly influenced the wording of imperial laws dealing with religious conflicts.⁷ It is likely that similar things also occurred in other parts of the empire.

This chapter, therefore, will focus on the laws regarding burning or banning any kind of books and on any aspect of banning pagan or heretical teaching in imperial legislation, focusing primarily on the collections of the *Codex Theodosianus* and the *Codex Justinianus*. I have already taken into account pre-Christian legislation against astrologers and magicians in order to show that book-burning was a specific legal feature of Late Antiquity. These law compilations contain the essence of Christian imperial legislation since Constantine and were influential well into the Middle Ages and beyond. They were compiled from regional imperial advices given to individual officials or groups. After the compilation and official publication of the *Codex Theodosianus* in 438 these laws became generally applicable, although not generally enforced. They are therefore significant in telling us what genres of books may have been and were targeted. In the following chapters of this book I shall argue that laws on book-burning and censorship are indeed similar to the language of Christian authors. Thus a broader range of literary genres than hitherto suspected may have been vulnerable to censorship and perhaps even book-burning, certainly more than a cursory reading of the laws might suggest at first glance. The question is: which censorship laws were actually enforced? This chapter, therefore, will also discuss the known incidents when the Roman authorities actually burnt books or when people were prosecuted for illegal teaching, proposing that a grey area existed of writings that were banned or perhaps even destroyed on the grounds that they contained material defined as heretical or otherwise forbidden. In this chapter and the next, I shall go on to argue that clerics and ascetics were more often involved in enforcing censorship legislation than the Roman authorities, which, however sometimes assisted Christian groups. I will therefore argue that in order to understand the enforcement of censorship we must understand the types of texts which these Christian groups viewed as unworthy.

I shall start with the magic trials under the emperor Valens, during which a large quantity of books were reportedly destroyed, and I shall raise the question of why later sources thought this to be key for the demise of pagan philosophy. I shall then go on to discuss censorship laws during the Theodosian dynasty, a pe-

⁶ Lotz (2005), 17–18, 159–60.

⁷ Hermanowicz (2008).

riod of time which is best known for its anti-pagan legislation, arguing that book-burning laws were enforced by the clergy rather than by state authorities. After a brief look on other sanctions that pagan intellectuals had to face in the fifth century, I shall go on to discuss the censorship legislation and its enforcement in the age of Justinian, arguing that Justinian's policy of restoration facilitated a robust approach to suppressing pagan literature.

2.1 Magic Trials under the Emperor Valens

In the previous chapter I discussed the censorship legislation up to the death of the last pagan emperor Julian. Following Julian's death, book-burning begins to be reported on a larger scale, although its practice still rests on previous religious legislation. Julian's successor Jovian (363–364) was a Christian and he restored the privileges to the Church. In 364, the Nicene Christian Valentinian I succeeded Jovian as emperor along with his brother Valens, who tended to promulgate Arianism during his reign in the Eastern part of the empire. Initially both emperors showed relative tolerance towards pagans. Although his religious policy is less well-evidenced than that of his brother, Valens did not deny promotions to pagans. This picture changed when both in their respective dominions came to conduct what is known as magic trials, in Rome from 369 to 375, and in Antioch from early 372 onwards.⁸ What had started as Valens' brutal reaction to a conspiracy soon turned into a general investigation of suspicious religious activity throughout the Eastern empire and an unprecedented incident of book-burning.⁹

Valentinian I and Valens passed their own laws against suspicious pagan activities in their respective dominions. On 12 December 370, before the magic trials started in Antioch, a law was passed in Constantinople, ruling that “the teaching of astrology shall cease.” It stated that if any person “should be caught while engaged in this forbidden error [...], he shall suffer capital punishment”, regardless of whether he is a teacher or student of such “prohibited things.”¹⁰ Christian authors frequently employ the term *error* to refer to philosophical or heretical tenets.¹¹ The law is addressed to Modestus, praetorian prefect of the East, who

⁸ On the date of Valens' arrival in Antioch, Lenski (2007), 108, 125.

⁹ Amm. 29.1.5.

¹⁰ *Cod. Theod.* 9.16.8: *cesset mathematicorum tractatus. nam si qui publice aut privatim in die noctuque deprehensus fuerit in cohibito errore versari, capitali sententia feriat uterque. neque enim culpa dissimilis est prohibita discere quam docere.*

¹¹ What Christians regarded as heretical or pagan thinking. See *TLL* 5.2, s.v. II.B.3, 818.

headed a commission to judge the trials.¹² By contrast, Valentinian passed two different but more sympathetic laws for the senate of Rome in 371: neither divination nor other forms of *religio* allowed in the past were to be considered criminal offences unless they were harmfully practised. Legal procedures were regulated for senators involved in magic trials.¹³ The emperors reacted to initial accusations as outlined below. However, both emperors in Constantinople in an unknown year issued a harsh edict on burning pamphlets.¹⁴ Along with the laws against *mathematici* (“astrologers”), this could have served as the legal basis for the book searches that followed.

The magic trials started when Valens reacted to contemporary theurgists’ attempting to reveal his fate and possible successor by divination. According to the pagan historian Ammianus Marcellinus most of the first victims were philosophers and men of higher learning.¹⁵ All of them were tortured to confess the accusations against them, some were burnt alive.¹⁶ Among them was Maximus, distinguished philosopher and former teacher of the emperor Julian, who had been instrumental in Julian’s rejection of Christianity.¹⁷

These magic trials, held in Antioch in the early 370s, have been interpreted as a specific reaction to a conspiracy,¹⁸ but also as a decisive blow against ancient philosophy.¹⁹ Some emperors of the first century also reacted harshly to perceived conspiracies. The incident has been perceived as a blow against philosophy because Ammianus reports that forbidden books were sought out and burnt, including books on the liberal arts and on law. According to his account, the books served to prove the charges of treason against their owners as if their possession alone resembled a crime:²⁰

12 *PLRE* 1, Modestus 2, 605–8.

13 *Cod. Theod.* 9.16.9–10. See Lenski (2002), 222.

14 *Cod. Theod.* 9.34.7: *Impp. Valentinianus et Valens aa. ad edictum. Famosorum infame nomen est libellorum, ac si quis vel colligendos vel legendos putaverit ac non statim chartas igni consumpserit, sciat, se capitali sententia subiugandum.*

15 *Amm.* 29.1.25–40. See Wiebe (1995), 106–11, for a prosopography.

16 *Amm.* 29.1.38, 44.

17 *Amm.* 29.1.42.

18 The standard account is Lenski (2002), 211–34. And see Sarefield (2004), 74–80.

19 Curran (1998), 93, note 43, with reference to Zosimus (see below); Robinson (London, 2007), 153: “the trials virtually wiped out the remaining pagan philosophers of the east”, because of the loss of so many of their libraries.”

20 *Amm.* 29.1.40–41: *...de quibusdam sine spiramento vel mora supplicium, dum quaeritur, an sumi deberet, et ut pecudum ubique trucidatio cernebatur. deinde congesti innumeri codices et acervi voluminum multi sub conspectu iudicum concremati sunt ex domibus eruti variis ut illiciti ad leniendam caesorum invidiam, cum essent plerique liberalium disciplinarum indices variarum et iuris.*

Some were executed without any delay or breathing-space, while the examination of whether they should be punished was still ongoing, and the whole scene appeared to be a slaughter of cattle. Then, innumerable books and many heaps of scrolls were piled up and burnt under the eyes of the judges, having been ferreted out of various houses as illegal books in order to alleviate the animosity arising from the executions. However, most of them were titles on various liberal arts and on law.

This passage provides evidence for the grey area that existed between religion and magic that surrounded the concept and practice of book searches and book-burning. The memory of the earlier trials in 359 likely made people in the East sensitive towards the potentially rigorous prosecution of any items (including writings) that could give rise to the suspicion of treacherous activity, significant because simply wearing charms or passing a sepulchre at nightfall were sufficient grounds to bring treason charges against individuals.²¹ The judges mentioned by Ammianus responsible for prosecuting these charges can be aligned to the *defensores civitatum*, which were appointed empire-wide to act as a religious police at the end of the fourth century as we will see shortly. It is logical that people were normally denounced because of reasons such as envy or personal conflicts.

A second wave of trials swiftly followed when the first inquiries produced new evidence against men of learning, including some probable Christians.²² These trials were conducted not only in Antioch, but in every part of the empire under Valens' authority. Ammianus reports that more houses were thoroughly searched for items interpretable as related to the magical arts.²³ Writings, even private letters written by a philosopher to his wife, were searched for the remotest hint of conspiracy against the emperor. If such was found, their keepers were executed.²⁴ Alluding to the sword of Damocles, Ammianus goes on to say that people throughout the empire burnt their books:²⁵

The consequence was that throughout the eastern provinces whole libraries were burnt by their owners for fear of a similar outcome; so great was the terror which affected everyone.

²¹ Amm. 19.12.14.

²² Amm. 29.2.1–2. On Christians (Bassianus, Eusebius and Hypatius), Lenski (2002), 228, note 94.

²³ Amm. 29.2.3.

²⁴ Amm. 29.2.25–8.

²⁵ Amm. 29.2.4: *inde effectum est per orientales provincias, a domnis metu similibus exurerentur libraria omnia: tantus universos invaserat terror. namque ut pressius loquar, omnes ea tempestate velut in Cimmeriis tenebris reptabamus paria convivis Siculi Dionysii pavitantes, qui, cum epulis omni tristioribus fame saginarentur, ex summis domorum laqueariis, in quibus discumbabant, saetis nexos equinis et occipitiis incumbentes gladios perhorrebant.*

For to speak briefly, we all crawled about at that time as if in Cimmerian darkness, filled with the same kind of fear as the guests of Dionysius of Sicily. While they were stuffed with a meal more terrible than any possible hunger, they dreaded the swords hung over their heads suspended by horse-hairs from the ceiling of the houses in which they were dining.

The term “Cimmerian darkness”, derived from a Homeric people living in perpetual darkness at the edge of Hades, is also used by the Christian Lactantius. In this context, it is notable that Lactantius states that pagan authors, just as Christians, described their philosophy as the truth.²⁶ Ammianus here picks up a Christian polemical term against pagan philosophy attributed to the philosopher Anaxagoras and his school. This seems to imply that he was alluding to the religious dimension of book-burning. However, Ammianus had a reason to exaggerate the cruelty of Valens not only because of religious dissent but also because of the emperor’s failure:²⁷ his army was routed and he himself died at the battle of Adrianopolis in 378. Moreover, Ammianus seems to have lived in Antioch at that time. Thus while he is reliable as an eye-witness in this context, as with our other sources we must also allow for his positioning in relation to these events.

Shortly before the events in Antioch, the Western emperor Valentinian conducted similar magic trials in the city of Rome from 369 onwards. In reaction to unspecific charges of magic, members of the elite and some commoners were charged with treason. Their religious affiliation is not always recorded, but it seems that although some Christians were among the culprits, the majority was pagan.²⁸ Ammianus does not report book-burning here but he does mention the ownership of forbidden writings as a reason for accusations and allegations. The son of an Urban Prefect of 365/6 was put to death after he was convicted of having copied a book containing references to harmful arts.²⁹ Similarly, in connection with the trial against Iulius Festus Hymetius, proconsul of Africa in 366/7, the house of his fortune-teller was searched. “Quite secret papers” were produced to prove the accusation.³⁰

²⁶ Lact. *inst.* 5.3.23.

²⁷ Averil Cameron (1993), 164; Lenski (2002).

²⁸ Lenski (2002), 220–23; Robinson (2007), 144–7. On the connection between the trials in Rome and those in Antioch, Amm. 29.2.23–4.

²⁹ Amm. 28.1.26: *codex noxiarum artium*.

³⁰ Amm. 28.1.19–20: *secretiores chartae*.

Other sources confirm the trials against philosophers and the danger involved in keeping forbidden books for Antioch and the East.³¹ The Christian author John Chrysostom, a writer who in context of the following passage argued against Epicurean philosophy and suggested that the Epicurean position endorsed magic as we will see in section 4.6, provides eye-witness evidence of such actions occurring in his early twenties. A key point of evidence for the atmosphere following the magic trials exists in his account of something that happened when his native city of Antioch was occupied by soldiers under orders to search for books about magical arts.³² In this story, John notes, an unnamed person had started working on a suspicious book but thrown it in the Orontes river prior to and anticipating his arrest. He was executed nonetheless. A friend of John's saw the book floating on the river. Upon inspection they found magical notes.³³ At the same time, a soldier passed by, scaring the two young men to death as they would have faced execution for possessing the text despite their innocence because of the harsh laws against book offenders. Hiding the book, they narrowly escaped. John's account gives some indication of the climate of fear and intrigue that the laws had initiated.

Later authors regarded the religious struggle as the underlying reason for the magic trials, suggesting that these had caused the demise of ancient philosophy. Shortly before 450 the Church historian Sozomenus concluded with regard to the reign of Valens: "Almost all of the Greek philosophers perished at this time." However, authors like Sozomenus tend to interpret history as a success story of Christianity and therefore distort the historical facts. Moreover, he suggested, some of these philosophers, regarded as superior in their art, had attempted to learn the name of Valens' successor "because they felt angry about the progress of Christianity."³⁴ This divination, inspired by the hope of a more tolerant future emperor, was taken as an excuse for further trials. While Church historians do not tend to engage with this case in any detail, the pagan Zosimus' account, written some half a century later, goes into much more explicit detail of these events. As with Ammianus, Zosimus describes homes being searched, informers lodging allegations, and trials and executions occurring. According to Zosimus, Valens directed his anger towards philosophers and men of learning. The instigator of

31 Overview of sources on the magic trials: Wiebe (1995), 317, note 1.

32 Chrys. *hom. 38 in Ac. 5* (PG 60:274): βιβλία γοητικά καὶ μαγικά.

33 Chrys. *hom. 38 in Ac. 5* (PG 60:275): ἐγγεγραμμένα μαγικά.

34 Soz. *h.e.* 6.35.1–2: ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ἀφηγησάμην, ἐφ' ὅσον μοι μαθεῖν ἐξεγένετο περὶ τῶν τότε ἐκκλησιαστικῶν φιλοσόφων. τῶν δ' αὖ Ἑλληνιστῶν μικροῦ πάντες κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ διεφθάρησαν. τινὲς γάρ, οἱ τῶν ἄλλων ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ προφέρειν ἐνομίζοντο, πρὸς τὴν ἐπίδοσιν τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ δυσφοροῦντες. Other sources: Philost. *h.e.* 9.15; Socr. *h.e.* 4.19.

the trials was Festus, *proconsul Asiae* from 372 to 378.³⁵ Zosimus could be right because there are attested cases of literary men executed on the order of Festus known from other sources as well.³⁶ So, it is probable that the trials initiated by Valens in the East could have caused the ruin of many books owned by philosophers, but the rhetoric of the related texts requires caution. Although to some pagan authors the episode seems to have appeared a landmark case of cruelty inflicted by Christian emperors, it is likely that its impact was exaggerated over time. The authorities apparently searched for books in order to gather evidence for treason, but this hardly explains why these texts were burnt. Book-burning may have served as a public ritual, designed to intimidate the population, something that we will see happening more often in this chapter and the next.

2.2 The Theodosian Dynasty

In 380/81, in accordance with the Nicene Creed Theodosius I (379–394) declared Catholicism the state religion in both parts of the empire and ordered that non-Catholics, defined as “others” should be judged as “insane” and “heretical.”³⁷ In 391/2, he issued the greatest number of laws against religious deviators in Roman history, although Theodosius showed no general hostility against Christians throughout his early reign. It is traditionally assumed that Ambrose, bishop of Milan, had caused him to change his mind. Many of these laws were somewhat regionally and temporarily limited and the reasons for their promulgation are often unclear. However, the following laws were addressed to the *praefectus praetorio per Orientem* and therefore valid for the Eastern Empire. Religious offences were placed on a par with high-treason (*maiestas*),³⁸ for which exemptions from torture were regularly waived regardless of social rank.³⁹ The orders of things deemed religious offences covered not only sacrifices and divination but also vaguely defined scientific investigations:⁴⁰

³⁵ Zos. 4.14.2–15.3.

³⁶ *PLRE* 1, Festus 3, 334–5 mentions Amm. 29.2.23–5; *Lib. or.* 1.158–9; *Eun. fr.* 39 Blockley; *Eun. VS* 480–81 (Wright, 458–60).

³⁷ *Cod. Theod.* 16.1.2 (addressed to the people of Constantinople but pertaining to “all people”); 16.5.6.

³⁸ *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.12.1 (8 November 392, addressed to the PPO).

³⁹ See Peters (1985), 18–25.

⁴⁰ *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.12.1: *sufficit enim ad criminis molem naturae ipsius leges velle rescindere, illicita perscrutari, occulta recludere, interdicta temptare, finem quaerere salutis alienae, spem alieni interitus polliceri.*

For it is sufficient to constitute an enormous crime that anyone should wish to abolish the laws of nature itself, to explore illegal matters, to disclose secrets, to attempt interdicted practices, to seek to know the end of someone's life, to promise the hope of someone's death.

The ban on sacrifices and temple visits was also renewed as was a ban on magic spells: "For we admonish that God is to be worshipped with chaste prayers rather than to be desecrated with gruesome songs."⁴¹ Private accusations were permitted to be made by anyone, and judges, "inquisitors", "defenders" (*defensores*), and the decurions of each city were placed in charge of enforcing these regulations – a move curiously redolent of the organization of the medieval inquisition.⁴² Evidence of this latter prescription is seen in the *Codex Theodosianus* which attests that *defensores* had been seen in various regions of the empire as local enforcers of these types of laws since Valens – this makes it probable that they are the same *defensores* that Ammianus refers to as judges in charge of book-burning.⁴³ The *defensores* themselves (at least in Italy) were to be elected from a body highly experienced in administration and rhetorical training, suggesting that they were well able to recognise the contents of incriminated books.⁴⁴

Members of the Theodosian dynasty, like their predecessors, ordered an unspecified range of slanderous and religious pamphlets to be burnt. This shows that slander continued to be the cause for book-burning, as it had been in the imperial period, although this charge was now more closely linked to religion. For example, in 386 Valentinian II and Theodosius forbade anyone curious (*curiosus*) enough to read pamphlets (*famosi libelli*) from divulging their contents to anyone else. Anyone found with such a book who did not destroy it immediately would be executed unless he produced its author for prosecution. This law is addressed to Cynegius, *praefectus praetorio per Orientem* from 384 to 388. Cynegius often collaborated with local bishops in destroying temples throughout the Eastern Empire.⁴⁵ It seems therefore likely that this book-burning law was unrelated

⁴¹ *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.7: *moneamus castis Deum precibus excolendum, non diris carminibus profanandum* (21 December 381, addressed to the PPO).

⁴² *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.12.1/4, 16.5.9: *inquisitores*; cf. 9.16.1 (Constantine and Licinius in 319 rewarded those who denounced diviners).

⁴³ *Cod. Theod.* 1.29.1–8; 9.2.5 (Honorius and Theodosius II, 409); 11.8.3 (same). And see Frakes (2001).

⁴⁴ *Cod. Theod.* 1.29.3.

⁴⁵ *Cod. Theod.* 9.34.9: *si quis famosum libellum sive domi sive in publico vel quocumque loco ignarus offenderit: aut discerpat prius, quam alter inveniatur, aut nulli confiteatur inventum, nemini denique, si tam curiosus est, referat, quid legendo cognoverit. nam quicumque obtulerit inventum,*

to earlier laws on burning pamphlets in Africa. In 406, Arcadius and Honorius issued a similar law (also addressed to the PPO) ordering anyone who came into the possession of a pamphlet to “tear it in pieces immediately or burn it in flames.”⁴⁶ These laws provided the legal basis required to destroy books defaming Christianity. As the contents were to be kept secret by law, this gave that authority to the finder as to which books should be destroyed and undermined the position of the book owner as they could not therefore argue against the burning by alluding to the book’s content in their defence. The Christian tenor of both these laws is implied through the use of the term “curious” to describe the reading of texts. This word was used by Christian authors polemicizing against philosophical positions antithetical or in opposition to Christianity, as we will see shortly.

Similarly, the edict of 406 refers to the content of the targeted books as a “poisonous weapon” (*venenatum telum*). In 407, Honorius and Theodosius II ruled that all previous laws against heretics, “pagans” and Manichaeans were still in effect.⁴⁷ These apparently included the book-burning and expulsion laws. In 409, Honorius and Theodosius II ordered that:⁴⁸

We decree that the *mathematici* be expelled not only from the city of Rome but also from all cities, unless they burn the books containing their errors under the eyes of a bishop, are willing to convert to belief in the Catholic religion, and never to return to their previous error. If they do not do this and are caught in cities in violation of the medicative prescription of our clemency or if they disseminate the secrets of their error and profession, they shall suffer the punishment of deportation.

In this source, the contents of the books ordered to be burnt are now more vaguely defined as *error proprius*. Just as in the law from 406, the edict is presented in

certum est, ipsum reum ex lege retinendum, nisi prodiderit auctorem, nec evasurum poenam huius modi criminibus constitutam, si proditus fuerit cuiquam retulisse, quod legerit. PLRE 1, Maternus Cynegius 3, 235 – 6.

⁴⁶ *Cod. Theod.* 9.34.10: *universi, qui famosis libellis inimicis suis velut venenatum quoddam telum iniecerint, ii etiam, qui famosam seriem scriptionis impudenti agnitam lectione non ilico discernerint vel flammis exusserint vel lectorem cognitum prodiderint, ultorem suis cervicibus gladium reformident.*

⁴⁷ *Const. Sirmond.* 12 (407).

⁴⁸ *Cod. Theod.* 9.16.12 (Caeciliano pr.pr. d. 1 Feb 409 Ravenna) *mathematicos, nisi parati sint codicibus erroris proprii sub oculis episcoporum incendio concrematis catholicae religionis cultui fidem tradere numquam ad errorem praeteritum redituri, non solum urbe Roma, sed etiam omnibus civitatibus pelli decernimus. quod si hoc non fecerint et contra clementiae nostrae salubre constitutum in civitatibus fuerint deprehensi vel secreta erroris sui et professionis insinuerint, deportationis poenam excipiant.*

metaphoric terms, describing a “medicative prescription.” A law passed in the same place (Ravenna) and year (409) placed local judges under the threat of deportation unless they enforced existing laws against Donatists, heretics, Jews and pagans.⁴⁹

Unlike previous religious legislation, there is evidence that the law on burning the books of the *mathematici* from 409 was actively enforced. In a sermon on the Gospel of John, on a date usually given as the early fifth century,⁵⁰ Augustine instructed the congregation in how to deal with discussions with pagans and specifically the counter-argument that the gospel portrayed Jesus as living under the fate:⁵¹

If he said this in the sense of the *mathematici*, we have committed a sacrilege in burning their books. But if we have acted rightly, as was done in the times of the apostles, it was not in their sense that the Lord said: ‘My hour has not yet come.’

Augustine linked this recent burning of books to book-burning in Ephesus in the Acts of the Apostles. It appears that Augustine and other sources mostly use the term *mathematici* in the meaning of astrologers. However, I shall discuss the range of possible meanings for this term in more detail in the next section.

The law of 409 was communicated to the praetorian prefect of Italy and Africa. It is therefore likely that Augustine had witnessed books burnt in Africa. According to the text, Augustine seems to imply that it was the local clergy rather than the Roman authorities who enforced book-burning. In this case, the law of 409 had permitted the clergy to do so, if necessary with support of Roman officials. While Augustine was very limited in terms of what he could do, for example, about pagan shrines on private property, these astrologers, by contrast, likely frequented public places. Moreover, throughout his early work Augustine complains about the practice of astrology and divination in Africa.⁵² That the *mathematici* are mentioned mostly in the early *Confessions* could indicate that the book-burnings had worked and the problem of their cultural visibility had ceased to exist later.

From a Christian standpoint, pagan oracles, astrology and divination needed to be shunned because they were connected to demons. Athanasius, for exam-

⁴⁹ *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.46.

⁵⁰ Fitzgerald et al. (1999), xlvii dates the work to “406/421?” with further literature.

⁵¹ Aug. in *evang. Ioh.* 8.10: *et si hoc secundum mathematicos dixit, sacrilegium fecimus incendiando codices eorum. si autem recte fecimus, sicut apostolorum temporibus factum est; non secundum eos dixit dominus: nondum venit hora mea.*

⁵² O'Donnell (1992), 209–11 on a list of attestations. F. van Fleteren in Fitzgerald et al. (1999), 547, with reference to Aug. *conf.* 4.3.4.

ple, held the opinion that the demons were able to move so quickly that they could foretell certain events that were about to happen elsewhere. These demons, however, were keen to drag human beings into hell. Monks and ascetics (and clerics, too) were therefore instructed to fight against demons, which appeared in the shape of evil thoughts of their spirits and were often linked to dangerous animals and sexual urges. In doing so, they lived the lives of true philosophers, as soldiers of Christ. The role model for this fight was the biblical account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. On the other hand, foresight into the future was morally good when it was inspired by God rather than by demons.⁵³

The law of 409 may have been in effect earlier in the city of Rome before it was implemented further afield throughout "all cities." Prudentius possibly alludes to expulsions of astrologers in his work *Contra Symmachum*.⁵⁴

He [the emperor] expelled many Catilines from their homes, who were preparing neither fierce fires for houses nor daggers for the senators, but black hell to the souls and torture to the internal state of humankind. Everywhere, the enemies did linger around the temples, the halls of private houses, and they held the Roman Forum and the lofty Capitol. They were accustomed to work out treacherous deceit for the vital parts of the people, and with poison that creeps inside to pour out the disease into the silent marrow.

Both sources deploy the legal term for expulsion (*pellere*) and the individuals described as "enemies" and "Catilines" are associated with those places astrologers used to roam, such as temples and the forum. Catiline was a famous enemy of Cicero and a conspirator. The term is therefore a literary topos for public enemies, and we have already seen that astrologers were deemed enemies in legislation. We will see that they and other groups were also deemed enemies in Christian polemics. The contagious poison alluded to here is used by Prudentius and other Christian authors as a literary topos for suspicious texts related to astrology and heresy. We can see the same metonymy in the expression "medicative prescription" in the *Codex Theodosianus*. It is also well known that the first book of Prudentius' *Contra Symmachum* frequently alludes to imperial religious policy. This passage stands in the general context of the Christianisation of the city of Rome and is followed by allusions to the senate being converted. Expul-

⁵³ Ath. v.Anton. 22–3, 31, 33; Matt. 4:1–11.

⁵⁴ Prud. c.Symm. 1.529–37: *multos Catilinas | ille domo pepulit, non saeva incendia tectis | aut sicas patribus, sed Tartara nigra animabus | internoque hominum statui tormenta parantes. | errabant hostes per templa, per atria passim, | Romanumque forum et Capitolia celsa tenebant, | qui coniuratas ipsa ad vitalia plebis | moliti insidias intus serpente veneno | consuerant tacitis pestem miscere medullis.*

sions of astrologers were likely seen as a step in this development. It is also pertinent to note that the early medieval glossators of Prudentius' text explained these enemies (*hostes*) as “devils” (*diaboli*) and “perverts” (*perversi*),⁵⁵ common terms for pagans and heretics in Christian authors. This shows that monastic scribes were still somewhat aware of the probable meaning of this episode as they shared the same ideal.

On the other hand, it is assumed that Prudentius completed this work probably in about 402, a few years before the promulgation of the law in 409.⁵⁶ However, the date is largely based on the *argumentum ex silentio* that one battle is not mentioned there, which is not a strong argument. The preface to Prudentius' *Cathemerinon* dates from 404/5 and the manuscripts place it at the very beginning of his works, so it appears Prudentius had compiled his own *magna editio* in this year and wrote the preface on this occasion. Yet, it is often doubted that Prudentius had stopped writing at this time.⁵⁷ This is because from Prudentius' oeuvre, only the *Cathemerinon* and, less clearly, the martyr hymns of the *Peristephanon* are alluded to in the preface of 404/5.⁵⁸ The order of Prudentius' *magna editio* is thus odd and has raised many questions in previous research.⁵⁹ This *magna editio* may well have been compiled much later. Some scholars believe that some parts of book one of *Contra Symmachum* (the source for the extract quoted above) or all of it have been written earlier, namely during the final

55 Burnam (1905), 79, ad *C.Symm.* 1.529, 533 and 538.

56 See Döpp (1986); Barnes (1976), 375–6 argues that Prudentius had knowledge of Claudian's *De bello Getico*, which was probably finished in 402. Prudentius also mentions the battle of Pollentia in early 402.

57 Shanzer (1989), 347–50; Lavarenne (1948), vol. 3:9.

58 Prud. *praef.* 37–8: (*sc. peccatrix anima*) *hymnis continuet dies, | nec nox ulla vacet quin Dominum canat* (which refers to the *Cathemerinon*), and 42: *Carmen martyribus devoveat* (*Peristephanon*).

59 Summary in Steidle (1971), 260–62. Scholars have argued that the fourteen poems included in the edition of Prudentius' *Peristephanon* do not display the poet's original plan, suggesting instead that the material was ordered in this way by the early sixth-century editor, Vettius Agorius Basilius. In the oldest surviving manuscript of Prudentius' works (Codex Puteanus), Agorius' name is found in a subscription at the end of Prudentius' *Cathemerinon*. The codex itself is mutilated at the beginning and end. It is thus missing the preface and everything after the martyr-collection *Peristephanon* 5, line 142 – just before the book-burning scene –, including the two books *Contra Symmachum*. All the other most ancient manuscripts assign to the Romanus hymn a place independent from the collection *Peristephanon* in which it appears in Bergman's edition as no. 10. In the two manuscripts which are independent from Vettius Agorius' archetype, it is placed directly after the two books *Contra Symmachum*. This suggests that the Romanus hymn is thematically linked to *Contra Symmachum*.

years of Theodosius.⁶⁰ However, I suggest that Honorius' introduction is in the encomiastic style as "the excellent emperor in our time"⁶¹ in a passage of book one which precedes the extract quoted above. The date of final publication of the work as a whole falls into the age of Honorius. It would therefore be somewhat inappropriate to refer to a different emperor. I am in agreement with Steidle's suggestion that the chronological inconsistencies of the depiction of religious policy in book one are the result of an idealising narrative that conceives the anti-pagan legislation of both emperors as a unified policy.⁶² At any rate, according to the text of the law of 409, astrologers had already been expelled from Rome before order was given to extend these expulsions to other areas. It is therefore possible that Prudentius was alluding to these earlier expulsions in Rome at a date unknown between 394 and 402, perhaps even later.

These temporal speculations become important when it is considered that it has frequently been posited that Prudentius wrote *Contra Symmachum* as a reaction to a senatorial pagan revival.⁶³ The argument has largely rested on the interpretation of the term "renewed disease" (5: *renovata lues*) in the opening lines of book one. This could allude to Eugenius' pagan-friendly policy in late 394, when he was temporarily accepted as emperor in Rome. However, Alan Cameron has challenged the idea of this signifying a pagan revival, arguing that Eugenius did little more than not to enforce Theodosius' anti-pagan legislation and so to allow paganism to revive⁶⁴ (and it is even doubtful that Theodosius visited Italy after the battle at the Frigidus in 394⁶⁵). The only occasion during which a pagan revival is attested in the ancient sources from 402 to 410 is Alaric's first siege of Rome at the end of 408, when senators renewed sacrifices on public expense.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Most recently, Alan Cameron (2011), 343–9. Other publications include Tränkle (2008), 20–27, 36–7, 44–8; Harries (1984), 71–3; Barnes (1976), 384–6. For an overview, Rohmann (2003), 238–9, 249.

⁶¹ Prud. *c.Symm.* 1.528: *praecipuus nostro sub tempore princeps*.

⁶² Steidle (1971), 250, 264–73.

⁶³ See Barnes (1976); Döpp (1980); Harries (1984); Gnilka (1991).

⁶⁴ Alan Cameron (2011), 75–92: there is no firm evidence for renewed sacrifices at this time (p. 78); 122–3, 338–42 date the opening of book one to 394/5. To my mind, although Prudentius certainly mentions the religious legislation by Theodosius (379–395), the *renovata lues* could also allude to a later event.

⁶⁵ See Alan Cameron (2011), 47, note 58.

⁶⁶ Zos. 5.38, 41–2; Soz. *h.e.* 9.6; Olymp. *fr.* 6 Blockley. Discussion and testimonials in Alan Cameron (2011), 190–95; arguments in favour of a late date, perhaps under Honorius: 338–42, esp. 340.

It is therefore pertinent that senatorial sacrifices are mentioned in the opening of book one. As this is in the context of banning sacrifices, the reference only makes sense if some senators broke this ban.⁶⁷ These sacrifices can be taken as a manifestation of the “renewed disease”, mentioned just before. Perhaps this section accounts for a final revision as late as 408. Regardless of the date of Prudentius’ work, the law of 409 could therefore also be seen as a reaction to this pagan revival at the end of 408.

Moreover, it is worth having a look at laws on the burning of heretical books during this time period. The destruction of heretical and Manichaean literature is well evidenced in imperial and canon law, such as council acts, as well as Christian authors.⁶⁸ There are also known testimonials regarding the destruction of texts promulgating Manichaeism from the Theodosian dynasty. As I have already established, it is also clear that Constantine ordered the writings of Arius to be burnt as heretical writings (along with those by the pagan philosopher Porphyry). However, despite this, Arianism continued to be popular until the end of Antiquity. Many emperors after Constantine were Arian. Arianism was also adopted by many non-Romans, such as the Visigoths. However, the emperors Arcadius and Honorius in 396 issued a number of laws (in Constantinople) to expel all members of the Eunomian branch of Arianism (named after the Arian bishop Eunomius of Cyzicus who had died a few years before) and to track down the authors of Eunomian books.⁶⁹ Because of the death of its founder, Eunomian doctrine was at its height and had gained influence among the political elite. Both emperors further ruled in 398 that the Eunomians as well as the Montanists were to be expelled from cities. Under these laws Arian books were to be found, confiscated and burnt “under the eyes of the judges” and those who concealed them were to be executed “as a retainer of noxious books written with the crime of magic.”⁷⁰ That this process was sometimes carried out is evidenced in letters written by one Consentius to Augustine which detail the case of a group of heretics and of “magic” books in the possession of a local priest discovered by a monk in Tarragona, Spain, in the early fifth century. The books and all documents related to the case were burnt.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Prud. *c.Symm.* 1.8: *neve togas procerum fumoque et sanguine tingui*. The memory of Stilicho, mentioned in Prudentius (*c.Symm.* 2.743), was condemned only on 10 December 408 (*Cod. Theod.* 7.16.1).

⁶⁸ See Speyer (1981), 142–57, 182–4.

⁶⁹ *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.30–32; Philost. *h.e.* 11.5.

⁷⁰ *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.34.1: *sub aspectibus iudicantium ... velut noxiorum codicum et maleficii crimine conscriptorum retentatorem*.

⁷¹ Ed. Divjak (*CSEL* 138:51–80); see van Dam (1986); Burrus (1995), 115–25.

Several years later, Theodosius II and Valentinian III issued a law in Constantinople in 425 that ordered that false teachers were to be henceforth expelled from the cities where they taught – echoing both the law against the *mathematici* in 409 and the earlier cited law from 392 which forbade investigations into nature. Although the charges against them were unspecific, individuals were to be forcibly expelled if they “again attempted to do that which we prohibit and condemn.”⁷² The sense of continuity emerging is further supported by a law from 438, in which Theodosius II repeated some of the earlier provisions against non-Christians, notably in its barring of Jews and Samaritans from public offices and in ruling that the death penalty could be applied for those convicted of offering or conducting pagan sacrifices. In its direct linking of pagan sacrifices to natural disasters like poor harvests, Theodosius II’s law inferred that the Christian divine order was disturbed and upset by pagan cult practice.⁷³

As it is not clear which books exactly were ordered to be burnt, I shall discuss the range of meanings of pertinent key words in the following two sections.

2.3 Philosophy and Astrology

We have seen that imperial legislation included laws against astrology and divination. One pertinent law from 409 prescribed that astrologers were to burn their books. We have also seen that in two of his sermons Augustine attests that this law was enforced by the clergy in North Africa. Both Augustine and imperial legislation indicate that the Latin word for “astrologers” was *mathematici*. This section will therefore discuss the range of meanings of these terms and raise the question of what kind of literature could have been burnt as a consequence of this law.

When emperors of the first century did expel astrologers the Latin sources sometimes refer to these as *mathematici* and Cassius Dio (who wrote in the Greek language) calls them *astrológoi*.⁷⁴ I shall argue in this section that the term *mathematici* became ambiguous in Late Antiquity and could refer to people other than astrologers. For example, the term was associated with philosophical traditions. The case of Domitian (81–96) in this instance is pertinent. According

⁷² *Cod. Theod.* 14.9.3 pr.: *usurpantes sibi nomina magistrorum ... adfatus quae prohibemus adque damnamus iterum forte temptaverit.*

⁷³ *Novell. Theod.* 3.1, 8.

⁷⁴ Dio Cass. 49.43.5; Agrippa. *Tac. ann.* 2.32; Suet. *Tib.* 36; Dio Cass. 57.15.8–9; Tiberius. *Tac. ann.* 12.52; Dio Cass. 61.33.3b; Claudius. *Tac. hist.* 2.62; Suet. *Vit.* 14.4; Dio Cass. 64.1.4; Velleius.

to classical authors, Domitian expelled philosophers from Rome and perhaps from Italy, but there is no indication that he also expelled astrologers.⁷⁵ By contrast, Christian sources from the fourth century and later have Domitian expelling both *mathematici* and philosophers. In opposition to Cassius Dio, the eighth-century Byzantine chronographer Synkellos employed the Greek equivalent *mathematikoi*,⁷⁶ suggesting that the terms became blurred in the Christian period.

The term *mathematicus* is usually translated as astrologer and in particular Mayor has shown that the commonest meaning of *mathematici* in the contexts of banning, punishing or expelling, is astrologer.⁷⁷ On the other hand the Latin noun *mathematicus* has a broad range of meanings in both Christian and pagan authors and does not necessarily mean astrologer in different contexts. Compiling Latin texts up to the sixth century, the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* categorizes about a third of all instances under this broader meaning of the term. In these interpretations, a *mathematicus* is someone experienced in the liberal arts, a scientist rather than a scholar of the humanities in a modern understanding.⁷⁸ Gellius in the second century explains that:⁷⁹

The ancient Greeks called geometry, gnomonics [the science of making sun-dials], music and the other higher studies *mathémata*; but the common people call *mathematici* those who ought to be called Chaldeans on account of their ethnic name. Thereafter, equipped with these studies in science, they progressed to the investigation of the phenomena of the world and the principles of nature and eventually they were called *physikoi* [natural philosophers].

⁷⁵ Suet. *Dom.* 10.3; Plin. *ep.* 3.11; Philostr. *VA* 7.3; Dio Cass. 67.13.2–3.

⁷⁶ Hier. *chron.*, a. Abr. 2111, AD 95 (GCS 47:192); Georgius Syncellus, *Chronographia* P. 343D = Dindorf 1:650 = Mosshammer, 419: τοὺς μαθηματικούς δεύτερον ἀπῆλασε φιλοσόφους τῆς Πρώτης. Syncellus followed Jerome's *Chronica*. Suid. s.v. Δομετιανός, 1351 Adler, also has both terms.

⁷⁷ See the list of instances in expulsion contexts in Mayor ([1881] 2007), 329–31. And see also the discussion of the opinions of various philosophers and of the *mathematici* in Eus. *p.e.* 15.46–53.

⁷⁸ TLL 8 (1966), s.v. *mathematicus* II subst., 471–2 has 86 attestations of *astrologus*, *Chaldaeus* (without legal attestations) and 46 attestations of *vir disciplinarum liberalium peritus*. See Vitruv. 1.1.17; Cic. *Tusc.* 5.18; Aug. *civ.* 21.8. Aug. *c.Fel.* 1.10: *Christianos enim facere volebat, non mathematicos*.

⁷⁹ Gell. 1.9.6–7: *quoniam geometriam, gnomonicam, musicam ceterasque item disciplinas altiores μαθήματα veteres Graeci appellabant; vulgus autem, quos gentilicio vocabulo 'Chaldaeos' dicere oportet, 'mathematicos' dicit. Exinde his scientiae studiis ornati ad perspicenda mundi opera et principia naturae procedebant ac tunc denique nominabantur φυσικοί*.

In this context, he says that the term *mathematikoi* applies to students of such fields. While Gellius' text suggests that *mathematici* was a somewhat outdated term for natural philosophers, there is more evidence linking the teaching of *mathematici* to Epicurean traditions. In Late Antiquity, in the context of the magic trials, Ammianus attests that the understanding of the term *mathematicus* among common people was different from his own.⁸⁰ He explains elsewhere that *mathematici* usually followed the view, first put forward by the pre-Socratic philosopher Democritus, that the universe is almost infinitely larger than the earth's circumference.⁸¹ This clear statement links *mathematici* closely to Epicurean traditions. Jerome could have shared this view when he wrote in a Bible commentary that it is necessary to have knowledge of *mathema* in order to write against a *mathematicus* and knowledge of philosophy to argue against philosophers.⁸² I would argue that Jerome is alluding to Neoplatonists as philosophers and to other groups who followed Epicurean traditions (not just astrologers) as *mathematici*.

The Greek words *máthema* and *mathematikós* can also signify the field of general knowledge – “that which is learnt” – particularly in the field of mathematical sciences or, alternatively, astrology.⁸³ In this way, the emperor Julian in the fourth century placed astronomy, geometry, arithmetic and music under the generic terms “science or philosophical *máthema*.”⁸⁴ Sometimes Christian authors use the term also for biblical studies or similar Christian religious occupations, suggesting that the exact meaning depends on the context. Desanti probably extended it too far when she argued that the term *mathematici* in the *Codex Theodosianus* could refer to either heretics or pagans.⁸⁵ Her argument is based mostly on a comparison of similar laws which define *mathematici*, *superstitiones gentilium*⁸⁶ and other deviant groups as enemies of the Church, but the enforcement of these laws is unclear.⁸⁷

In around AD 200 Sextus Empiricus wrote eleven books known as *Adversus Mathematicos*, representing the broad meaning of this term that comprises a

⁸⁰ Amm. 29.2.6.

⁸¹ Amm. 15.1.4.

⁸² Hier. in Dan. 1.8: *si quispiam adversus mathematicos velit scribere imperitus μαθήματος, risui pateat, et adversum philosophos disputans, si ignoret dogmata philosophorum.*

⁸³ LSJ, 1072; Stephanus, *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae* 6 (1954), 496–8. See Porph. VP 5.37.

⁸⁴ Cyr. Juln. 5.36 (= PG 76:772C–D = Fr. 38 Masaracchia, 133): ἐπιστήμης ἢ μάθημα φιλόσοφον.

⁸⁵ Desanti (1995).

⁸⁶ Cod. Theod. 16.5.63.

⁸⁷ Cod. Theod. 16.5.62 (cf. Const. Sirmond. 6), 64.

broad range of scholarly groups. He explains that “astrology” (*astrología*) could be synonymous to the “mathematical art” (*mathematikê*), “which in its completeness is composed of arithmetic and geometry.”⁸⁸ In imperial times, however, the Chaldeans were astrologers and wanted to be named *mathematikoi*.⁸⁹ Sextus Empiricus regularly referred to the astrologers as *Chaldaíoi*, suggesting that *mathematici* were not necessarily astrologers.

Explicating problematic disciplines, John Chrysostom counts both Pythagoras and Plato among those “that had strayed”, authors and philosophers who had been instructed in astrology, mathematics, geometry, and arithmetic as well as in every sort of learning (*paídeusis*). It must of course be noted that John means that these disciplines, while not necessarily harmful in themselves, can contribute little to understanding the divine. According to John, these authors have been surpassed by the work of the apostles. In marking the boundaries between acceptable faith and unacceptable curiosity, John delineates the difference between “true philosophers” and “those who are by nature foolish and lunatic”.⁹⁰ John discriminates between “our philosophy”, that is the Christian world view, and “external” or “pagan” philosophies. Part of John’s viewpoint is that prior to Christian teaching, much of the previous philosophies were motivated by attaining the vanity of fame. In rejecting this, and trampling on their conceit, reward awaits both in this life and after.⁹¹ Such views can be linked to the Christian ethos of the martyr, with its further link to acts of martyrdom and book-burning.

Augustine’s works are another example for this ambiguous meaning. He also appears aware that the term was used differently within the population.⁹² In a sermon, Augustine mentions the case of a *mathematicus* burning his books to demonstrate conversion. Augustine portrays the person to burn his books as a nominal Christian, who, seduced by the devil, had been a *mathematicus* for a long time. As such, he had deceived others to stray as well. This shows that he had a contagious influence on others. He is characterized further as a person attributing what is evil not to his own will but to astrological signs. The link to paganism is emphasized for the purposes of the narrative, “for if a *mathematicus*

⁸⁸ S.E. M. 5.1.

⁸⁹ LSJ, s.v. Χαλδαῖος, 2.1971.

⁹⁰ Chrys. hom. 63 in Jo. 3 (PG 59:352): διὰ τοῦτο Πλάτωνος καὶ Πυθαγόρου, καὶ πάντων ἀπλῶς τῶν πλανηθέντων οὗτοι περιεγέγοντο· καὶ τοὺς ἀστρολογία, καὶ μαθηματικῇ, καὶ γεωμετρία, καὶ ἀριθμητικῇ κατατριβέντας, καὶ πᾶσαν παιδείου ἐκμαθόντας ὑπερέβησαν, καὶ τοσοῦτον ἐγένοντο βελτίους, ὅσον οἱ ἀληθῶς φιλόσοφοι καὶ ὄντως τῶν φύσει μωρῶν καὶ παραπαιόντων.

⁹¹ Chrys. hom. 63 in Jo. 1 (PG 59:349).

⁹² Aug. haer. 70: qui mathematici vulgo appellantur.

converts from paganism, this certainly is a great delight.”⁹³ In this context, he mentions *mathematici* and non-conformist Christians as separate but deriving from the same serpent.⁹⁴ “They let in the devil, they drive out Christ.” Attacking pagans in a manner common to these types of polemics by suggesting that they are responsible for acts of adultery, he also explicitly links the *mathematici* to the Manichaeans.⁹⁵ In “being deceived”, the *mathematici* also “deceive others, and propound fallacies to men” in the open streets and at the forum,⁹⁶ both places where ancient philosophers used to proselytise. In doing so, he argued that they worship the astrological signs of “Saturn, Jupiter, Mercury, and anything else with a sacrilegious name”, while elsewhere he extended these attacks by arguing that the works of the Manichaeans and the Priscillianists should also be disposed of.⁹⁷

Further in the context of this sermon, Augustine mentions the books burnt in Ephesus in the Acts of the Apostles. He refers to the people that burnt these quite generally as “school-members of such outrageous doctrines.”⁹⁸ However, even after publicly burning their books, converts were still under suspicion and it was advised that they should be monitored for any suspicious behaviour:⁹⁹

Look at him, know him, and in whatsoever regard he might stray, notify him to the other brothers currently not present; and this watchfulness is charity, suitable to prevent him

93 Aug. *enarr. in. Psalm. 61.23* (CCSL 39:792): *Namque si ex pagano converteretur mathematicus, magnum quidem esset gaudium*; cf. Speyer (1981), 170.

94 Aug. *in evang. Ioh. 8.8*: “To whom then must we make answer first, to the heretics or to the *mathematici*? For both come of the serpent, and wish to defile the church’s virginity of heart.” (*quibus ergo prius respondendum est, haereticis, an mathematicis? utrique enim a serpente illo veniunt, volentes corrumpere virginitatem cordis ecclesiae, quam habet in integra fide.*); cf. 8.5: *veneno serpentis*; 8.6.

95 Aug. *in evang. Ioh. 8.5*: *immittunt diabolum, excludunt Christum*; 8.8; cf. *conf. 5.7.12*.

96 Aug. *in evang. Ioh. 8.11*: *veruntamen seducti seducunt, et proponunt fallacias hominibus; tendunt ad capiendos homines, et hoc in plateis. ... in foro. ... vel Saturnum, vel Iovem, vel Mercurium, vel si quid aliud sacrilegi nominis.*

97 Aug. *nat. bon. 47*: “They shall therefore throw away the books if they are appalled of the crime, which they are forced to commit if they keep the books. If they do not commit it, they try to live more cleanly, in opposition to their books.” (*abiciant ergo libros, si crimen exhorrent, quod committere coguntur, si libros tenent; aut si non committunt, mundius vivere contra suos libros conantur.*).

98 Aug. *nat. bon. 47*: *doctrinarum nefariorum sectatores.*

99 Aug. *enarr. in. psalm. 61.23* (CCSL 39:792): *videte illum, scitote illum, et quacumque ille transierit, fratribus ceteris qui modo hic non sunt, ostendite illum; et ista diligentia misericordia est, ne ille seductor retrahat cor ... testimonio vestro nobis confirmetur vere illum ad dominum esse conversum.*

from seducing hearts. [...] It is by your testimony that we are assured of whether or not he has truly been converted to the Lord.

Peer-pressure was crucial in persuading people to dispose of, and permanently abstain from access to, forbidden books. In the *City of God* (written between c. 411 and 427), Augustine also noted that there was a blurred understanding that saw pagan and heretical groups labeled as carriers of ancient philosophical traditions. He mentions three broad groups of philosophers: the “Platonists”, “philosophers in general” (*quicumque philosophi*), and the “theurgists.” The latter were classed as miracle-workers and would be more properly described as “dabblers” or *periurgi*, a term derived from the Greek *periērga* which is used in the Acts of the Apostles in relation to the books burnt in Ephesus.¹⁰⁰ Elsewhere in the *City of God* Augustine ranks *mathematici* alongside Stoic philosophers as far as foreknowledge is concerned with Cicero being quoted as having refuted the actuality of divination. Where both the Stoics and the *mathematici* claimed the power of divination, Augustine argues, only the Christian God truly has the power of foresight.¹⁰¹ In this context, Augustine also mentions “the famous *mathematici* Adrastus of Cyzicus and Dion of Naples”, individuals about whom little else is otherwise known other than they appear to have been astronomers because they described an astronomical phenomenon involving the planet Venus.¹⁰²

Written perhaps in 423/4,¹⁰³ Cyril of Alexandria’s treatise *Contra Julianum* answers the emperor Julian’s claim that Christians should not read pagan literature. In doing so, Cyril defines the range of pagan teaching called *mathemata*, the practitioners of which were theoretically outlawed as *mathematici* in the late Roman Empire. His discourse therefore gives some indication as to which texts were unlikely to have been preserved. These texts can be identified with pagan texts that would today be considered of a scientific nature that are based on methods proposed by some of the old philosophers. At the end of book five, Cyril returns to Julian’s argument that the Greeks, based on earlier research by the Babylonians, Egyptians and Phoenicians, had significantly developed the main fields of learning: astronomy, geometry, arithmetic and music.¹⁰⁴

100 Aug. *civ.* 10.16.

101 Aug. *civ.* 5.9.

102 Aug. *civ.* 21.8 (CCSL 48:771): *Adrastos Cyzicenos et Dion Neapolites, mathematici nobiles*, quoted from Varro. Dion of Naples is perhaps identical with one Dion mentioned in Censorin. 18.11 (third century AD) as having calculated, among others, the duration of the solar year.

103 Vinzent (2000), 41 – 60.

104 Cyr. *Juln.* 5.36 (= PG 76:772C–D).

In support of his school reform, Julian's aim was to show that Christians have contributed nothing to sciences like these, and that they had no interest in science and should abstain from science altogether. Cyril derives the necessity of censorship from Plato:¹⁰⁵

I think Greek learning is vain and very useless and requires much labour for no reward. While you will probably not have faith in my words, your Plato shall be called upon for aid, my noble friend, who wrote in the fifth book of the Republic: 'Should we count all these, then, and the other *mathematikoí* of this kind as well as the philosophers of the minor arts as true philosophers? No, he said, not those that are just similar to philosophers. And the true philosophers? Yes, those that are keen to contemplate the truth.' For philosophy is not found in the assumptions and hypotheses of geometry, in musical theory or in astronomy, which is packed with physics with its change and probability. But it is about the science of the good and of truth, since these are two different paths, as it were, of the good that lead to the good. Therefore, the practice of philosophy lies not in the minor arts, which are so ridiculous, but in knowing the truth, that is what truly exists, which is God.

The reference to Plato allows Cyril to compile the practitioners of the aforementioned sciences – or the ancient liberal arts¹⁰⁶ – under the generic name of *mathematici* – a loaded concept as *mathematici* were ordered to burn their books in imperial legislation in 409. In another section of this treatise, Cyril pays special attention to those who attributed divinity to the elements of the world. In particular, he refers to the Chaldeans, who investigated the movements of the stars, something that biblical figures had detested at various occasions.¹⁰⁷ Elsewhere, Cyril links Greek philosophy to divination.¹⁰⁸ While the definitions essayed by

105 Cyr. *Juln.* 5.38 (= PG 76:773D–776A): ψυχρά δὲ οἶμαι τὰ Ἑλλήνων, καὶ τὸ εἰκαῖον ἔχοντα πολὺ καὶ μακρῶν ἰδρώτων ἐπ' οὐδενὶ ζημίαν. καὶ ἀπιστήσῃ μὲν ἴσως τοῖς παρ' ἡμῶν εἰρημένοις, κεκλήσεται δὲ πρὸς ἐπικουρίαν ὁ σὸς, ὃ κράτιστε, Πλάτων, ὡδὶ γεγραφῶς ἐν τῷ πέμπτῳ τῆς Πολιτείας· “τούτους οὖν πάντας, καὶ ἄλλους τοιούτων τινῶν μαθηματικούς καὶ τοὺς τεχνυδρίων φιλοσόφους θήσομεν; Οὐδαμῶς, εἰπεῖν, ἀλλ' ὁμοίους μὲν φιλοσόφους. τοὺς δὲ ἀληθινοὺς, ἔφη, τίνας; τοὺς τῆς ἀληθείας, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, φιλοθεάμονας.” οὐ γὰρ ἐν ‘γεωμετρίᾳ’ αἰτήματα, καὶ ὑποθέσεις ἐχούση φιλοσοφία οὐδὲ ἐν ‘μουσικῇ’ σχολαστικῶ γε οὔση οὐδὲ ἐν ‘ἀστρονομίᾳ’ φυσικῶν καὶ ρεόντων καὶ εἰκότων βεβυσμένη λόγων, ἀλλ' ‘αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ δι' ἐπιστήμης καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας’, ἐτέρων μὲν ὄντων τάγαθοῦ, ὁδῶν δὲ ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τάγαθόν. οὐκοῦν οὐκ ἐν ‘τοῖς τεχνυδρίοις’ τοῖς ὧδε κατεσκευασμένοις τὸ φιλοσοφεῖν ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ εἰδέναι τὴν ἀλήθειαν, τοῦτέστιν τὸ ὄν ἀληθῶς, ὅπερ ἐστὶ Θεός. Pl. *r.* 5.475e, quoted from Clem. *str.* 1.19.93.3; Other Christian authors referring to the passage are Eus. *p.e.* 2.7.4–7; 13.3.3–6 und Thdt. *affect.* 2.7; Canivet (1958), 112, note 2. Burguière and Énixeux (1985), 216, note 1.

106 Cyr. *Juln.* 5.39 (= PG 76:776B): τὰς καλουμένας ἐγκυκλίους τῶν ἐπιστημῶν, in accordance with the definition given by Quint. *inst.* 1.10.1.

107 Cyr. *Juln.* 1.21–4 (= PG 76:528C–529D).

108 Cyr. in *Isaia* 4.1 (PG 70:893D–896A).

Christian authors probably had little impact on public authorities, this terminological coincidence may suggest that Cyril admonished his readers not to study or preserve related pagan books.

Cyril even goes so far as to link the beginning of (pagan) *mathémata*, or ancient science, to original sin. The serpent that tempts Eve to eat from the forbidden tree in paradise is, he argues, the “inventor of pernicious *mathémata*.”¹⁰⁹ Since this devil-serpent had promised “you shall be as gods” as a consequence of their gaining knowledge (*gnósis*) of good and evil, it had instilled “polytheism’s pernicious *máthema*” into the souls of the first men.¹¹⁰ This is an explanation why Christian authors of Late Antiquity use the snake and snake-poison metaphors often with regard to paganism and specifically with regard to branches of pagan learning or literature felt to be inappropriate for any Christian to be regarded as true.

Cyril did not occupy an outsider position among Christian ecclesiastical authors. For example, Theodoret of Cyrrhus also referred to Plato in order to show that “true” philosophers are different from practitioners of ancient sciences, arguing that this is because they deal only with partial knowledge. He too generically calls them *mathematikoi* and “philosophers of the minor arts” of geometry, music and astronomy.¹¹¹ Fifth-century Christian authors seem to have used this understanding of *mathematici* as a literary and rhetorical strategy to attack paganism and (like Augustine and Prudentius) they were probably aware of imperial censorship legislation regarding *mathematici*.

The wide-ranging nature of these pronouncements and their tendency to conflate groups suggest that it is possible that philosophical treatises were occasionally destroyed as a consequence of the law of 409 or similar censorship laws – even if the exact contents of these books remain obscure to us. It is the existence of laws and edicts such as this, positions that actively advocate and encourage censorship, which suggests that philosophical texts that were seen as opposing Christianity were unlikely to have been copied or actively preserved and may well have been destroyed instead. On balance, while the law of 409 primarily targeted astrology as a harmful art, the understanding of the term *mathematici* was not clear-cut and a number of contemporary authors link this term to literary and philosophical traditions other than astrology. It is therefore possible that the Christian authors labelled the charge of illegal astrology on individuals that publicly professed a view of the universe that was seen as inconsis-

¹⁰⁹ Cyr. *Juln.* 3.26 (= PG 76:640B): ὁλεθρίων μαθημάτων εὐρετής.

¹¹⁰ Cyr. *Juln.* 3.26 (= PG 76:640C): πολυθείας ὀλέθριον μάθημα.

¹¹¹ Thdt. *affect.* 1.33: τῶν τεχνυδρίων φιλοσόφους. And see 1.36 (based on Pl. *lg.* 3.689c–d; cf. Orig. *Cels.* 6.12.1–22; Eus. *p.e.* 12.8.2) with Siniossoglou (2008), 117–19.

tent with the biblical view and therefore assigned to a demonical counter-world. It is also possible that some itinerant philosophers made their living from offering astrological advice and that these too were affected by the law, especially since the law seems to have been enforced by the clergy rather than by the public authorities, as I shall also argue in the next chapter. In this case the astrological interpretation was blurred with the view that the movements of celestial bodies occurred without divine providence and could therefore be exploited to predict future events. In the following chapters I shall further discuss the question of which books the clerics and ascetics wished to get rid of. In the next section, I shall put the metaphors of curiosity and illness within the *Codex Theodosianus* into the context of the contemporary Christian polemical discourse.

2.4 Curiosity and Illness

This section shall discuss two key themes that appear both in imperial legislation and in contemporary Christian treatises from the late fourth and early fifth century: curiosity and illness. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, scholars have already established that the language of imperial legislation was often similar to that of Christian authors. This is because the clergy was sometimes involved in drafting religious legislation. My argument is that the impact of this could go either way. Clerics negotiated the language of Christian legislation and this in turn meant that the exact contents of books banned in legislation was open to interpretation if clerics and ascetics enforced these laws.

It is therefore pertinent that the concept of curiosity is linked to unlawful books and divination in imperial legislation.¹¹² I shall discuss in greater depth how Christian authors of Late Antiquity used this term specifically in regard to unwanted, heretical views put forward by ancient philosophers, arguing that this theme and others, while often based on ancient precedents, were among the rhetorical devices with which Christian authors intended to imply the superiority of Christianity as well as the death of memory of outdated philosophical opinions that contradicted Christianity. Christian authors employed this language in order to question the worthiness of texts that they disagreed with.

In the Latin language, the term *curiositas* is first attested in Cicero according to whom *curiositas* means greed for novelty.¹¹³ Classical authors use the terms “curiosity” (*curiositas/periergía*) or “curious” neutrally, although there is occa-

¹¹² For example, *Cod. Theod.* 9.16.4: *sileat omnibus perpetuo divinandi curiositas*.

¹¹³ Cic. *Att.* 2.12.2: *sum in curiositate ὀξύπεινος*.

sionally a negative undertone involved in their use of curiosity, indicating that curiosity can mean immoderate thirst for knowledge, for example, with regard to research into the movements of the stars.¹¹⁴ For Plutarch, curiosity is not negative as long as one is curious to learn the right things, such as inquiries into nature rather than gossip.¹¹⁵ By contrast, for early Christian authors curiosity has a negative connotation as it is separated from the knowledge of the gospels and often connected with the occult arts.¹¹⁶ This means that while the act of gaining knowledge is not necessarily morally wrong, any greedy attitude in gaining knowledge is morally wrong.

Augustine links inquiries into natural philosophy to illegitimate curiosity. Thus, for example, in his letter to Dioscorus he notes that in asking his questions on Ciceronian philosophy Dioscorus is “uselessly curious [...] veiled and clothed in the name of the liberal arts.”¹¹⁷ Thus Augustine was willing to reply only “to cut off”, “to quench and bring to a stop”, “to heal” him from, and “to break off”, such curiosity.¹¹⁸ Suggesting that Dioscorus was curious because he had read so many dialogues by philosophers, Augustine alludes to a literary topos used by Christian authors, namely that many ancient philosophers published sinfully for literary fame. He considered it similarly shameful for Dioscorus to ask Ciceronian questions in order to show off his knowledge to others.¹¹⁹ Acquaintance with these studies, for the purpose of showing off this knowledge “has a swelling under which putrefaction also grows.”¹²⁰ This shows that Augustine treated Dioscorus like an ill person. Dioscorus was apparently ill because of his curious state of mind. He was ill as he was swelled with pride.

It has been argued that Augustine’s concept of *curiositas*, especially in his *Confessions*, is based on the second-century Latin novel *Metamorphoses* by Apuleius. While for Apuleius *curiositas* is the attempt to understand the secrets of the universe through magic, in the works of Augustine *curiositas* appears to be any

114 An example is Sen. *nat.* 7.25.5: *harum quinque stellarum quae se ingerunt nobis, quae alio atque alio occurrentes loco curiosos nos esse cogunt*. See Fögen (1993), 290–94.

115 Plu. *de curiositate* 5 (*mor.* 517C–F).

116 Tert. *praescr.* 7: *nobis curiositate opus non est post Christum Iesum nec inquisitione post evangelium*. Fögen (1993), 297–304.

117 Aug. *ep.* 118.1.1: *ut vel disceres non esse inaniter curiosus, vel curiositatem tuam cibandam atque nutriendam imponere non auderes eis, quorum inter curas vel maxima cura est reprimere ac refrenare curiosos. ... liberalium studiorum nomine velatae atque palliatae*; referring to the philosopher’s *pallium*: Koopmans (1949), ad locum, p. 107.

118 Aug. *ep.* 118.1.1: *abripere de medio; reprimere ac refrenare*; and 1.3: *mederi; abrumperem*.

119 Aug. *ep.* 118.1.3 and 1.4: “so empty and fallacious a good as human praise” (*tam inani atque fallaci humanae laudis bono*).

120 Aug. *ep.* 118.1.5: *habet et tumorem, sub quo etiam tabes gignitur*.

effort to understand the divine other than through the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This means that learning is only valuable when it leads to the knowledge of God.¹²¹

John Chrysostom likewise suggested that it is curious to try to learn things beyond the message of the gospels. Thus, the interest in historical knowledge and research pursued by Jews and Greeks, peoples who enumerate their gods, displays a curiosity that John argues is incommensurable with Christian faith:¹²²

For where there is faith, there is no need for investigation. Where there is no need for curiosity, what need is there for investigation? Investigation is the destruction of faith. For he that investigates has not yet found. He who investigates cannot believe. Paul therefore advises us not to engage with investigations, since if we investigate, it is not faith; for faith puts an end to reason.

Linking curiosity to illness, John continues to suggest that Greek doctrines are madness and folly because they are based on human disputes, doubts, and conclusions, whereas Christian doctrines are true wisdom because they are the word of God. He criticises a Greek pedagogy based on debate and discussions, arguing that obedience to the teacher is all. Because of their willingness to debate, the destructive doctrines (of ancient philosophy) needed to be excluded.¹²³

Throughout his corpus of works, Cyril of Alexandria also repeatedly argues that curiosity is aligned with philosophical opinions that contradict the Bible, specifically on the subject of creation. For example, he describes research into the stars, the universe and the elements as “curious.”¹²⁴ Moreover, he makes a virtue of Moses apparently refraining from enquiring into “things too curious”, such as “natural philosophy”, “the first causes” and the “elements”.¹²⁵ Here, as elsewhere, Cyril roughly employs the same term for scientific curiosity as the Acts of the Apostles do for the “curious arts” (*perierga*) in the book-burning scene in Ephesus, as we will see in the following chapter. Rather, Moses dissuaded those who were ignorant or who had been deceived by error from worshipping

¹²¹ See e.g. Walsh (1988) with further literature.

¹²² Chrys. *hom. 1 in 1 Tim. 2* (PG 62:506): ἔνθα γὰρ πίστις, οὐ χρεία ζητήσεως· ἔνθα μηδὲν δεῖ περιεργάζεσθαι, τί δεῖ ζητήσεως; ἡ ζήτησις τῆς πίστεως ἐστὶν ἀναιρετική. ὁ γὰρ ζητῶν, οὐδέπω εὔρεν· ὁ ζητῶν, πιστεῦσαι οὐ δύναται. διὰ τοῦτο φησι, μὴ ἀσχολώμεθα περὶ τὰς ζητήσεις· ἐπεὶ εἰ ζητοῦμεν, οὐκ ἔστι τοῦτο πίστις· ἡ γὰρ πίστις ἀναπαύει τὸν λογισμόν (referring to 1Tim. 1:3–4). On the context, also PG 62:507.

¹²³ Chrys. *hom. 1 in 1 Tim. 3* (PG 62:507).

¹²⁴ Cyr. *hom. pasch. 6.4* (PG 77:505C/D): περιεργάζονται; cf. Jouassard (1957), 501 on this subsection.

¹²⁵ Cyr. *Juln. 2.20* (= PG 76:577A): περιεργότερα ... φυσιολογεῖν ... πρῶται ἀρχαί ... στοιχεῖα.

that which had been created (such as heaven) instead of the creator.¹²⁶ Cyril's attitude towards pagan philosophy here is twofold: on the one hand, he considers the opinions of those after Moses "who did curious research" to be stupidities that do not hold up to scrutiny;¹²⁷ on the other, he endorses Plato on the subject of creation, specifically the idea that everything originated from one god, something that had thus even been handed down in the writings of the "teachers of superstition".¹²⁸ Building on classical precedents but taking its meaning further, Christian ecclesiastical authors aligned unwanted curiosity with philosophical opinions that contradicted the Bible.

The motif of curiosity leads us to another favourite polemical motif by Christian authors: to present pagan philosophy as illness. For example, within the series of sermons on the Letter to the Corinthians, in one sermon John meditates on the biblical line "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the intelligence of the intelligent I will reject."¹²⁹ Following the example of Paul, he argues that pagans suffer from a (mental) disease in their souls that requires treatment and suggests that they need to be drawn over to salvation by the medicine of compassion, even though he notes that these ill persons may be disgusted at such medicine.¹³⁰

Compounding this with John's view on curiosity, it appears that curiosity itself was presented as disease that required treatment. We have seen this link in Augustine's letter to Dioscorus. John also attacks philosophical theories using words such as "devilish hatred", "full of abomination" (if stripped off their rhetoric), "blasphemy" and "the snare of the devil." Pythagoras' defining the universe as consisting of numbers, for example, is compared to uncovered sepulchres "full of corruption, and stench, and rotten bones."¹³¹ This compares to Lactantius' view that the body of philosophy has perished because it became ill with conflicting opinions.¹³²

Medical metaphors repeatedly occur in regard to pagans and heretics both in Christian authors and in imperial legislation. Zuccotti has therefore argued that imperial legislation justified the punishment of pagans and heretics because it

126 Cyr. *Juln.* 2.20 (= PG 76:577B); cf. 2.24 (= PG 76:581A–B).

127 Cyr. *Juln.* 2.22 (= PG 76:580A): πολυπραγμονήσαντες.

128 Cyr. *Juln.* 2.29 (= PG 76:585D): δεισιδαιμονίας διδάσκαλοι.

129 1Cor. 1:19–20: ἀπολῶ τὴν σοφίαν τῶν σοφῶν, καὶ τὴν σύνεσιν τῶν συνετῶν ἀθετήσω.

130 Chrys. *hom.* 4 in 1 Cor. 1 (PG 61:29–30).

131 Chrys. *hom.* 2 in Jo. 3 (PG 59:32–3).

132 Lact. *epit.* 27: *discordantibus membris corpus omne philosophiae ad interitum deducitur. ... philosophi quia nihil munimenti habent, mutuis se vulneribus extinguant et ipsa tota philosophia suis se armis consumat ac finiat.*

regarded these individuals as mentally ill and that the medical discourse of Christian apologetic-polemical authors informed the language of the *Codex Theodosianus*.¹³³ I shall now discuss a few examples in order to outline the specific scope of this polemical metaphor.

Some polemical works, such as Epiphanius' *Panárion* ("Medicine Chest") and Theodoret's *Treatment of Greek Diseases*, contain medical metaphors in their titles. Theodoret of Cyrrhus' work aims to heal pagans, applying the medicine of the Gospel and harmonising philosophical views with its message.¹³⁴ For example, Theodoret compares pagan literature and philosophy to poison, but also to an antidote as a cure for pagans: "some parts we leave behind as poison; other parts we equip with the knowledge of our teaching and offer you these as an antidote treatment."¹³⁵ Pagan philosophy can therefore work both ways, as a dangerous drug or an aid to salvation, depending on the content.

Medical metaphors are occasionally linked to book-burning. In these cases, book-burning acts as a cure for the disease. Thus, in one of Prudentius' martyr poems, the penitent magician-philosopher Cyprian of Antioch purifies himself from the snake's poison, an allusion to his burning of the pagan books previously in his possession.¹³⁶

Augustine's *City of God* also contains a number of medical metaphors.¹³⁷ For example, summarising the content of his first five books, Augustine compares his task of persuading pagans of the Christian truth to that of a physician who attempts to cure sick people, albeit not always successfully.¹³⁸

It is considered to be the glory of vanity to comply with no amount of force of the truth, certainly to his destruction who is dominated by such a disastrous vice. For even despite all the industry of the physician who tries to heal him, the disease is incurable, not because of his fault, but because of the stubbornness of the sick person.

We can surmise that Augustine was concerned primarily about the health of the soul and its fate in the afterlife. We have already seen that he identified the sin of

¹³³ Zuccotti (1992).

¹³⁴ On the treatise as a whole, see recently Papadogiannakis (2012), esp. 45.

¹³⁵ Thdt. *affect.* 1.127: τὰ τῶν ὑμετέρων ποιητῶν καὶ συγγραφέων καὶ φιλοσόφων πονήματα μεταχειρισάμενοι, τὰ μὲν ὡς δηλητήρια καταλείπομεν, τὰ δὲ τῇ τῆς διδασκαλίας ἐπιστήμῃ διασκεύασαντες, ἀλεξιφάρμακον ὑμῖν θεραπέϊαν προσφέρομεν.

¹³⁶ Prud. *perist.* 13.57–8.

¹³⁷ Particularly books 21 and 22: Bochet (2005).

¹³⁸ Aug. *civ.* 6 pr. (CCSL 47:164): *quando ea putatur gloria vanitatis, nullis cedere viribus veritatis, in perniciem utique eius, cui vitium tam inmane dominatur. nam et contra omnem curantis industriam non malo medici, sed aegroti insanabilis morbus invictus est.*

pride, caused by belief in philosophical world views contrary to Christianity, as the reason for tumours. While Augustine is alluding to conversion, this metaphor may underline the significance of voluntary book-burning as a cure in contexts of conversion. The books rather than the body are doomed to burn, while the burnt book does not spread any contagious poison.

Moreover, some Christian authors associate the book with the human body that can be affected by disease. One example is Prudentius, a Christian poet of the early fifth century. In the final battle scene of the *Psychomachia* the allegory of Heresy is shown to be torn to pieces and thrown to “the greedy ravens, or cast into the foul, stinking sewers.”¹³⁹ There is a sense of retaliation in this scene: Heresy is torn apart because she had torn apart the unity of faith. This death scene has many literary precursors, the most pertinent of which in this context is Lactantius’ picture of the *corpus* of philosophy perishing because of the discord of various schools.¹⁴⁰ These metaphors originate from the close association of the work and its author in Antiquity. The famous Latin poet Ovid, for example, often identified himself with his own books that he sent to Rome from his exile at the Black Sea. Lucian, a Greek-speaking satirist of the second century, wrote that a pagan priest publicly burnt a book by Epicurus “as if he burnt the author himself.”¹⁴¹ In this instance the burnt book represents the dead author and is burnt instead of its author.

Underpinning this is the fact that the Latin word *corpus* can mean either the human body or a body/corpus of literature. This ambiguous meaning can be found in one of Prudentius’ martyr-poems, situated during the Great Persecution (in 303), when Roman authorities burnt Christian books. In his account, Prudentius is borrowing from, and alluding to, Martyr Act scenes in which the burning of Christian scripture is miraculously halted by rain and divinely punished.¹⁴²

139 Prud. *psych.* 721 – 2: *corvis quod edacibus ultro | offerat, immundis caeno exhalante cloacis | quod tradat.*

140 Lact. *epit.* 27.1: *discordantibus membris corpus omne philosophiae ad interitum deducitur.*

141 Lucian, *Alex* 47: ὡς δῆθεν αὐτὸν καταφλέγων.

142 Pass. *Saturnini* 3.5 (Franchi de’ Cavalieri, 52): “Fundanus, once the bishop of this city, handed over the lord’s scriptures to be burnt. When the magistrates set these on sacrilegious fire, rain came down suddenly from the clear sky, the fire that was set to the holy scriptures was extinguished. Hail also came down, devastating the whole region, and the elements raged in favour of the Lord’s scripture.” (...cum Fundanus, ipsius civitatis quondam episcopus, scripturas dominicas traderet exurendas: quas cum magistratus sacrilegos ignes adponerent, subito imber sereno caelo diffunditur, ignis scripturis sanctis admotus extinguitur, grandines adhibentur omnisque ipsa regio, pro scripturis dominicis elementis furentibus, devastatur.) Speyer (1981), 35. This Donatist Passion is translated by Tilley (1996), 27 – 49 (here: 30). It was written shortly after the events: Moss (2010), 199 – 200.

About to burn the body of the martyr alive, the torturer accuses the martyr Romanus as a magician (*magus*).¹⁴³ A common charge for book offences, in this context the torturer is scared that “the still extant body/corpus” (as in corpus of literature) will grow again after its neck is cut off, just like the Hydra’s, a water-snake with multiple heads and a representation of the devil. The torturer thus wants the Hydra as many deaths as she has single members and he wishes a very Hercules was present, one “accustomed to burning a hydra’s wounds” in order to prevent it from “renewing itself by the losses that impair this corpus.”¹⁴⁴ Alluding to the self-renewing snake hair of Medusa, this metaphor is an inversion of the rhetoric that describes the whole corpus of heresy threatening the unity of the Church like a serpent because of its multiple, disagreeing opinions.

In sum, both imperial legislation and Christian authors such as Augustine and Prudentius shared the belief that unlawful books contained demons that were keen on spreading mental diseases. It is thus logical that the act of banning or burning these books was viewed as a cure in the different late antique sources that I have discussed so far. We will see these metaphors occurring frequently in similar contexts throughout the following centuries.

2.5 Rutilius Namatianus and the Burning of the Sibylline Books

Even with this suggestion of an increasing sense of an official position, except for the explicit testimonials of Augustine there is little direct evidence that Roman authorities actively destroyed books under the Theodosian dynasty, despite its introduction of harsh legislation on the issue of heretical and astrological books. An interesting exception to this general point is the case of the pagan poet Rutilius Namatianus.

In 410, the city of Rome was taken by the Visigoths. Just a few years later, Rutilius Namatianus wrote the last piece of pagan poetry extant from the Latin literature which survives to this day – although its journey down to us is convoluted and fragmentary. Its history can be described thus: a retired urban prefect, Rutilius describes his journey in 417 from Rome to his estates in Gaul. Fragments of this poem (*De reditu suo*) – book one without the *prooemium* and 68 full verses from book two – survived in Renaissance copies of an

¹⁴³ Prud. *perist.* 10.868–9.

¹⁴⁴ Prud. *perist.* 10.871–85, esp. 877: *corporis superstitis*, 883–5: *ac se inminuti corporis damnis novum | instauret: ipse praesto erit tunc Hercules | hydrina suetus ustuire vulnere*.

eighth-century manuscript. After its discovery in the monastery of Bobbio in the late-fifteenth century, this manuscript, which also contained the *Epigrammata Bobiensia*, a text of pagan character, later disappeared. A modern find of a further thirty-nine fragmentary lines of book two was first published by Ferrari in 1973. In the academic engagements with these texts, Alan Cameron has challenged the pagan character of the poem because in the rediscovered lines Rutilius shows his support for the Christian patrician and later emperor Constantius III.¹⁴⁵ But Cameron agrees with the scholastic consensus that Rutilius was probably a pagan. I think Rutilius' paganism emerges from the pagan character of his poem. His wish, for example, that springs and trees could talk can be seen as a veiled jibe at Christianity and its polemicists, who had derided philosophers who had posited the possibility of this.¹⁴⁶ Rutilius' line "The conquered nation [Jews] oppresses the conquerors"¹⁴⁷ alludes to the poet Horace's well known *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes | intulit agresti Latio* (Ep. 2.1.156–7). The point it suggests is that just as Greek culture dominated Rome after it conquered Greece, so the Judaeo-Christian tradition had come to dominate the Roman Empire after Titus had conquered Judaea. Rutilius could be right in suggesting that the most important and influential scholars were now Christians. I would not agree here with Alan Cameron who argues against the common interpretation that Rutilius had in mind the Judaeo-Christian tradition but was thinking only of Jews but not of Christians.¹⁴⁸ It is difficult to see a dominant (cultural) role for Judaism in the early fifth century. Rather, I think Rutilius was alluding to the view of early imperial authors that Christianity was a Jewish sect.

Moreover, his fear that his digression on the burning of the Sibylline books could be perceived as "garrulous"¹⁴⁹ can be read as an allusion to Christian authors who described pagan philosophers as garrulous people and babblers – a common derogatory term for philosophers.¹⁵⁰ The poem also casts monks in a negative light, suggesting that they are inimical to humankind.¹⁵¹ It even suggests his fear of encountering monks as he depicts his journey as being in the

¹⁴⁵ Alan Cameron (2011), 208–11, on the transmission: 373–4.

¹⁴⁶ Rut. Nam. 1.31–2: *ipsi quin etiam fontes si mittere vocem | ipsaque si possent arbuta nostra loqui*. Cf. Cyr. Juln. 3.21 (PG 76:633A–B).

¹⁴⁷ Rut. Nam. 1.398: *victoresque suos natio victa premit*.

¹⁴⁸ Alan Cameron (2011), 209–11.

¹⁴⁹ Rut. Nam. 1.61: *sed deverticulo fuimus fortasse loquaces*.

¹⁵⁰ For example, Aug. ep. 118.2.12: *loquacium Stoicorum aut Epicureorum*. I shall give more examples throughout this book.

¹⁵¹ Rut. Nam. 1.452: *dicatur humanum displicuisse genus*; 1.525–6: *num, rogo, deterior Circaeis secta venenis? | tunc mutabuntur corpora, nunc animi*; 1.445–6: *quaenam pervasi rabies tam stulta cerebri, | dum mala formides, nec bona posse pati?*

seas alongside the Italian coast. This avoids the land route because of the Gothic invaders, their “fire and sword” (1.40) but he notes that he is also careful to avoid travelling near the islands where monks lived (1.517).

Rutilius’ fragment ends with Stilicho burning the Sibylline books on the eve of the fall of Rome in 410.¹⁵² Rutilius considers this act to be the ultimate treachery, committed by a Roman leader before the Goths captured the city. While Alan Cameron’s contention that these were uncanonical Sybilline books can hardly be challenged or proven,¹⁵³ it is unlikely that Rutilius would be disturbed about their destruction if the books were completely meaningless to him. On the contrary, Rutilius shared the view put forward in the early imperial period that educated people needed to despise book-burning.¹⁵⁴ Yet besides book burning, there were other ways of punishing pagan intellectuals, as we will see in the next section.

2.6 Magic and Hellenist Trials in the Fifth Century

Alongside the attested cases for book-burning there exist some known examples of pagans facing sanctions for producing religiously offensive literature and poetry. The line between what constituted offensive and non-offensive poetry is difficult to ascertain. This is because of the transitional nature of a period when people continued to write poetry that was influenced by and at times directly imitated the form and content used by classical poets. Although much of early Byzantine poetry is of encomiastic nature, praising the emperor, much Christian poetry in the East continued to incorporate mythological themes.¹⁵⁵ This did not tend to be seen as religiously offensive at the time, but occasionally pagan poets (who were often now Neoplatonic philosophers) became involved in treason trials. Watts mapped the history of late antique Neoplatonic philosophers in Athens and Alexandria, tracing their eventual demise in Christian society.¹⁵⁶ Continuing Watts’ argument, I shall argue that state authorities displayed little interest in burning books authored by pagan philosophers or poetical works containing pagan material in the context of treason/Hellenist trials during the fifth and early sixth centuries.

152 Rut. Nam. 2.52: *ante Sibyllinae fata cremavit opis*.

153 Alan Cameron (2011), 213–17.

154 Sen. Maior, *suas.* 7.10; Quint. *inst.* 3.8.46.

155 See Alan Cameron (1965b) and more recently, Alan Cameron (2007).

156 Watts (2006).

It has been established that Neoplatonism was the dominant branch of pagan philosophy in Late Antiquity. And despite some Neoplatonists having attacked Christianity in writing, most Christian authors were appreciative of the teachings of Plato. There were many similarities between both groups, not least the degree to which both groups were opposed to materialist philosophy, especially its Epicurean manifestations.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, while there is clear evidence that Christians and pagans were instructed by Neoplatonic philosophers in the East, there are also examples of Neoplatonists falling foul of the authorities. For example, Cyrus of Panopolis, city prefect of Constantinople, whom Malalas named a (Neoplatonic) philosopher, aroused the jealousy of emperor Theodosius' II (408–450) because he had earned the favour of the population through a lavish building-program. He “was charged with being a Hellene”, lost his property and office and was sent to Phrygia as bishop of Kotyaion – a place where the people there had murdered four bishops (he personally survived this fate, though).¹⁵⁸

Another example is Pamprepus (440–484), described as “the last pagan poet known.”¹⁵⁹ His existence is attested in a lengthy article of Suidas and can be summarised thus: Originally from Thebes, he became a grammarian in Athens, studied philosophy at the Neoplatonist Proclus, and practiced poetry. After becoming involved in a scandal, he went to Constantinople where he became an associate of the powerful Illus, *magister militum per orientem*, before being exiled because it was suggested that he possessed “secret wisdom” (divination). In Isauria he was accused both of “his religion and that he used magic and consulted an oracle for Illus against the emperor”, resulting in his expulsion from there. On his eventual return to Constantinople, he was once more accused of possessing “some secret foreknowledge.”¹⁶⁰ With Illus, he eventually participated in a revolt of pagan intellectuals against the emperor Zeno in c. 483/4.

Similarly, in 490 Pelagius, *silentiarius*, patrician, and an author who also composed a history from the times of Augustus as well as poetry, was sentenced to death and executed by the emperor Zeno.¹⁶¹ The emperor had been informed

¹⁵⁷ See Schmid (1962), 772–4, 799–801.

¹⁵⁸ Jo. Mal. *chron.* 14.16: ἐπλάκη ὡς Ἑλλήν. And see Schlange-Schöningen (1995), 146 on the Hellenist trial against the grammarian, sophist and *quaestor sacri palatii* Isocassius in 467 and further Hellenist trials: p. 151–5.

¹⁵⁹ Alan Cameron (1965b), 508.

¹⁶⁰ Suid. s.v. Παμπρέπιος, 137 Adler: τῆς ἀρρήτου σοφίας ... ἐκ τῆς θρησκείας καὶ ὅτι μαγανεύοι καὶ μαντεύοιτο τῷ Ἰλλου κατὰ τοῦ βασιλέως ... ἐκ τινος ἀδήλου ταῦτα θειάζοι προγνώσεως.

¹⁶¹ Theoph. AM 5982–3; Cedr. (Bekker 1:621–2).

by Maurianus that a *silentarius* would succeed him. Fearing the implicit threat of this information, Zeno singled out Pelagius as the most likely danger and had him strangled, although there is some disagreement in the Byzantine sources as to the exact nature of the charge that was actually brought.¹⁶² The sixth-century chronicler John Malalas mentions prophecy, but in the eleventh century Georgios Kedrenos suggests that Pelagius had made use of liberty of speech to criticise the emperor while in the twelfth century Zonaras reports that Pelagius had been accused as a “Hellene.”¹⁶³

In all of the examples given above, the people involved in what were essentially treason trials conducted on the grounds of the accused Hellenist influences and philosophies all occupied high positions. The contexts suggest that the charges of paganism offered a convenient pretext for getting rid of unwanted people. Based on their contact with or production of suspicious texts, it is similar to the way that Roman senators of the first century AD were often charged with treason – although an obvious difference between both periods of time is that paganism (particularly when associated with prophecy) could now constitute a treason charge.

The only case known of book-burning among Neoplatonic philosophers is that of Marinus, a Jewish Samaritan who converted to paganism.¹⁶⁴ He seriously deviated from the tenets of mainstream Neoplatonism. During his tenure as Assistant Teacher at the Academy of Athens, he taught Aristotelian philosophy, geometry and mathematics and many of his writings on these subjects, as well as his commentaries on Euclid’s *Data*, appear to antedate the period when Marinus succeeded Proclus as head of the Academy. This may be because it was inappropriate for him to teach these subjects as the head of school. At any rate, their content brought him trouble, and it is known that he personally burnt the manuscript of his commentary on Plato’s *Philebos* before publication, fearing the resistance of those who taught pure Platonism, such as Proclus and Isidore.¹⁶⁵ It appears that he would have burnt his commentary on Plato’s *Parmenides* also, had it not already been published. The latter proposed from a Peripatetic standpoint (following the school of Aristotle) that Plato had written about ideas rather than gods.¹⁶⁶ It may well be that these contentious ideas impacted on his tenure as a teacher. Rather than enduring for the usual lifetime period, he was forced to

¹⁶² *PLRE* 2, Pelagius 2, 857–8.

¹⁶³ Jo. Mal. *chron.* 15.16; Cedr. (Bekker 1:621); Zonar. *epit. hist.* 14.2.29 (Büttner-Wobst, 132): ἑλληνισμὸν αὐτῷ ἐγκαλῶν.

¹⁶⁴ Dam. *epit. Phot.* 141 Zintzen.

¹⁶⁵ See Schissel (1930), 1761–6, esp. 1766.

¹⁶⁶ Dam. *Isid.* (Asmus, 89–90).

abdicate and take refuge in Epidauros after heavy criticism from Isidore and his purist Platonic party of his “Hellenist” background and a riot against him from the Christian population of Athens.¹⁶⁷

Marinus’ case is known from the *Life of Isidore*, written by Damascius, a mainstream Neoplatonist and the last school-head of the Neoplatonic Academy of Athens from 515 until the academy was closed in 529. His work has largely survived only in secondary references, such as those in Suidas and Photius. Even although they have allowed the piece to be reconstructed, in outlining the academy’s history from the late fourth century onwards the majority of the extant fragments have been rewritten and remodelled to such an extent that it is difficult to get a sense of its original style.¹⁶⁸ It is therefore difficult to fully reconstruct the history of the Neoplatonic Academy. What is clear, however, is that while Marinus as a pagan certainly suffered from the religious struggles of this time period his decision to burn his autograph was a voluntary one, albeit an action taken to avoid conflict with his religious and intellectual peer group. Compounding this decision and undoubtedly influencing it was the reality that the charge of Hellenism, with its links to the illegitimate practice of divination, could be applied to Neoplatonists if their teachings or acts were harmful to the emperor or seriously disagreed with the Christian world view. This indicates that educated people became less likely to preserve, copy or distribute texts of this kind because they could potentially be involved in a trial. When individuals had to fear legal charges that could best be proven through any problematic books they owned, then this could act as a stronger deterrent than outright book-burning.

2.7 Codex Justinianus

We have seen that imperial legislation compiled in the *Codex Theodosianus* included laws against heretical, magical and astrological books as well as anti-Christian treatises and often ordered their destruction. Compiled between 529 and 534, the *Codex Justinianus* is a collection of imperial law after the *Codex Theodosianus*. Its jurisdiction was valid across the Byzantine Empire (including the reconquered regions in the West) and it still influences modern international law. Justinian strongly believed in orthodoxy. I shall argue that enforcement of cen-

¹⁶⁷ Dam. *Isid.* (Asmus, 94–5).

¹⁶⁸ Asmus (1911), vii–viii.

sorship legislation by state authorities is better attested for the age of Justinian (527–565) than for the Constantinian and Theodosian dynasties.

Justinian was the first emperor to explicitly bar all pagans from teaching, and it is worth quoting in full the first law against pagan teachers from 529:¹⁶⁹

Concerning all the other heresies (we call heresies those who think and worship differently from the catholic, apostolic church and the orthodox faith) we wish that the law once enacted by us and by our father of blessed memory to be in force. In this law are prescribed the appropriate measures not only concerning them but also concerning the Samaritans and pagans, namely that those affected by such a disease shall not be in the military service or enjoy any position of rank. They shall not under the disguise of a teacher of any discipline divert the minds of the simple to their own error, and in this manner render them more indifferent toward the true and pure faith of the orthodox, but we permit only those to teach and receive public salary who are of the orthodox faith.

The consequences for pagan teachers were primarily a loss of status and earning power, but it did not mean that pagans willing to accept those consequences were allowed to carry on teaching. The law instead outlaws pagan teaching altogether. A related section of the *Codex Justinianus* contains a similar ban of pagan teachers, dating perhaps to 531:¹⁷⁰

Moreover, we forbid the teaching of any doctrine by those who suffer from the madness of the unholy pagans, so that they may not in this way pretend to teach those resorting to them in a pitiful manner, while in fact they corrupt the souls of their students, pretending to actually educate them. They shall not receive any municipal salary and they shall not have the freedom to claim anything of this kind according to a rescript or pragmatic sanction.

169 *Cod. Iust.* 1.5.18.4: ἐπὶ δὲ ταῖς ἄλλαις ἀπάσαις αἱρέσιν (αἱρέσεις δὲ καλοῦμεν τὰς παρὰ τὴν καθολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ τὴν ὀρθόδοξον πίστιν φρονούσας τε καὶ θρησκευούσας) τὸν ἤδη τεθέντα νόμον παρὰ τε ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ τῆς θείας λήξεως πατρός ἡμῶν κρατεῖν βουλόμεθα, ἐν ᾧ οὐ μόνον περὶ αὐτῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ Σαμαρειτῶν καὶ Ἑλλήνων τὰ προσήκοντα διατέτακται ὥστε τοὺς τὰ τοιαῦτα νοσοῦντας μήτε στρατεύεσθαι μήτε τινὸς ἀξιώματος ἀπολαύειν, ἀλλὰ μηδὲ ἐν στήματι διδασκάλου παιδείας διδόντες τὰς τῶν ἀπλουστέρων ψυχὰς εἰς τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἀνθέλκειν τλάνην καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο ποιεῖν αὐτοὺς ἀργότερους περὶ τὴν ἀληθὴ καὶ καθαρὰν τῶν ὀρθόδοξων πίστιν, μόνοις δὲ ἐκείνοις διδάσκειν καὶ σιτήσεως δημοσίας τυγχάνειν ἐφίεμεν τοῖς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως οὖσιν.

170 *Cod. Iust.* 1.11.10.2: πᾶν δὲ μάθημα παρὰ τῶν νοσοῦντων τὴν τῶν ἀνοσίων Ἑλλήνων μανίαν διδάσκεισθαι κωλύομεν, ὥστε μὴ κατὰ τοῦτο προσποιεῖσθαι αὐτοὺς παιδεύειν τοὺς εἰς αὐτοὺς ἀθλίως φοιτῶντας, ταῖς δὲ ἀληθείαις τὰς τῶν διδόντων παιδευομένων διαφθεῖρειν ψυχὰς· ἀλλὰ μηδὲ ἐκ τοῦ δημοσίου σιτήσεως ἀπολαύειν αὐτοὺς, οὐκ ἔχοντας παρρησίαν οὐδὲ ἐκ θείων γραμμάτων ἢ πραγματικῶν τύπων τοιούτου τινὸς ἄδειαν αὐτοῖς ἐκδικεῖν. On the date and on the term “municipal salary” (δημοσίου σιτήσις), see Watts (2004), 179–82.

This passage contains a number of medical metaphors, indicating that pagan teaching was seen as an infectious disease. Noethlichs has argued that the ban pertained to the pagan confession of the teacher rather than to the use of pagan texts in classes.¹⁷¹ However, while it is indeed likely that certain classical texts continued to be studied, it seems clear that from this point on teaching subversive (pagan) texts was officially seen as suspicious activity. Moreover, these laws were indeed enforced. The historians Procopius and the pagan Zosimus claim that teachers and physicians under Justinian lost their means of living, although it is interesting that they do not distinguish between pagans and Christians.¹⁷²

These two laws have often been linked to Justinian closing the Neoplatonic academy of Athens in 529.¹⁷³ In the same year Benedict founded the monastery of Monte Cassino in Italy. The apparent close relation of the two events have led some scholars to position 529 as the symbolic, if not literal, end of Antiquity. By contrast, Alan Cameron positions the academy's closing as being of relatively little cultural importance, arguing that it represents the natural end of a long period of slow decline.¹⁷⁴ There remains a question about the implementation of the teacher law and a corollary question as to whether it was solely limited to Athens. This is largely based on Malalas' report that Justinian banned philosophy, astronomy and dice playing in 529 specifically in Athens. While I will return to Malalas as a source in the following chapter, in the immediate context I would argue that Watts is correct to propose that the teacher law was an "omnibus anti-pagan law" rather than one limited to a certain area. It is also more accurate to note that Malalas' account is not directly related,¹⁷⁵ although both the law and the closing of the academy are manifestly part of Justinian's general religious policy.¹⁷⁶

The Pragmatic Sanction from Italy in 554 confirms this view, attesting that the law against pagan teachers was valid empire-wide. This Pragmatic Sanction legally underpinned Byzantine rule in Italy after Justinian had just restored Italy from Gothic dominion. The relevant section noted that grammarians, rhetoricians, physicians and jurists were to receive *annona*, which is the Latin equivalent to the Greek term for "municipal salary" in the teacher law from 531. This law from 531, as we have seen, regulated that the provisions in any Pragmatic

171 Noethlichs (1986), 1169–70. Contra: Schlange-Schöningen (1995), 156.

172 See Averil Cameron (1985), 21–2 and the following section.

173 See Meier (2003), 202–9.

174 Alan Cameron (1969).

175 Watts (2004), 178–9.

176 See Averil Cameron (1985), 21–2.

Sanction were to be restricted to orthodox teachers. The Pragmatic Sanction of 554 also notes that public *annona* was to be spent in the same way throughout Justinian's empire.¹⁷⁷ While the provision also mentions that the Gothic king Theodoric (d. 526) in Italy had spent *annona*, there is no evidence that this expensure was restricted to orthodox confession in Italy under Gothic rule. The impact of this legislation was potentially massive. As I will illustrate in Chapter 7, hardly any classical text is attested to have been copied in Italy during the two centuries that follow it.

Other laws in the *Codex Justinianus* repeated previous bans on pagan practices, primarily the practices of magic and divination, although they were somewhat vaguely defined. For example, property was to be confiscated if the owner allowed others there to “examine those things which have been frequently forbidden to persons attached to the pagan superstition.” The status of the individual defined the severity of the punishment.¹⁷⁸ This law dates from the shared reign of the Byzantine emperor Leo and his Western colleague, Anthemius (467–472), and appears to have been in effect in both parts of the empire. There is archaeological evidence, for example, to suggest that such confiscations actually happened in early sixth-century Athens.¹⁷⁹ Justinian also ruled that unbaptised people were to undergo religious education “along with their spouses, children and all persons in their household” and to “reject their previous error entirely.”¹⁸⁰ This compulsory education was to be based on teaching Scripture and it is likely that it allowed for the monitoring of individuals' reading interests.¹⁸¹

In the legal terminology, the boundaries between paganism and heresy had largely become interchangeable. The *Codex Justinianus* repeated Theodosius' legal definition of a person deviating from the Catholic religion as heretical from 379 but also added a general ban on the teaching of any profane tenets (*profana praecepta*).¹⁸² We will see that state authorities in the age of Justinian actively sought books on pagan as well as non-conformist Christian topics.

177 *Novell. Iust. App. 7, cap. 22: annonam etiam, quam et Theodoricus dare solitus erat et nos etiam Romanis indulsumus, in posterum etiam dari praecipimus, sicut etiam annonas, quae grammaticis ac oratoribus vel etiam medicis vel iurisperitis antea dari solitum erat, et in posterum suam professionem scilicet exercentibus erogari praecipimus, quatenus iuvenes liberalibus studiis eruditi per nostram rempublicam florent.*

178 *Cod. Iust. 1.11.8: nemo ea, quae saepius paganarum superstitionis hominibus interdicta sunt, audeat pertemptare.*

179 See Watts (2004), 181–2.

180 *Cod. Iust. 1.11.10.1: ἅμα γαμεταῖς καὶ παισὶ καὶ παντὶ τῷ κατ' αὐτοὺς οἴκῳ ... καθαρῶς ἀποβαλόντας τὴν προτέραν πλάνην.*

181 *Cod. Iust. 1.11.10.5.*

182 *Cod. Iust. 1.5.2; Cod. Theod. 16.5.5, 24, 28; cf. Cod. Iust. 1.1.1.1 = Cod. Theod. 16.1.2.*

The *Codex Justinianus* included a law given by the emperor Marcian in the year after the council of Chalcedon in 451. This law shows that the legal definition of heresy was open to interpretation. Marcian in Constantinople ordered that public discussions of the Christian faith were to be punished according to the social status of the offender in order to prevent people from engaging in religious discussions with pagans.¹⁸³

Alongside these prescriptions, it is worth investigating which books were ordered to be burnt in the *Codex Justinianus*. In 455 Marcian again issued a law forbidding:¹⁸⁴

anyone either to dictate or to write, publish or distribute anything against the holy Synod of Chalcedon, or to produce the writings of others on this subject. No one shall dare to have books of this kind, or preserve the sacrilegious memorials of writers, and if they are convicted of such crimes, they shall be condemned to perpetual deportation.

The preceding clause mentions the followers of Eutyches and Apollinaris as the authors of such tenets, but that the book ban is not restricted to these groups is outlined in the succeeding provision: “All papers of this kind, and all books which contain the pernicious dogmas of Eutyches and Apollinaris, shall be committed to the flames.”¹⁸⁵ These Monophysite authors had argued that Jesus had only one nature rather than a dual human and divine nature. But although Monophysite writings were the primary target, the wording encompasses any writing that is not in accordance with the Christian doctrine in its latest valid interpretation.¹⁸⁶ Provincial governors, their staff and the *defensores* of the cities – which I will later show conducting searches for magic books among pagans – were charged with putting these laws into effect.¹⁸⁷ The emperor Justinian in the sixth century ordered that anyone who copied Monophysite writings was to lose his writing hand.¹⁸⁸ But it is unknown whether these laws were enforced.

183 *Cod. Iust.* 1.1.4.

184 *Cod. Iust.* 1.5.8.9–10: *nulli etiam contra venerabilem Chalcedonensem synodum liceat aliquid vel dictare vel scribere vel edere atque emittere aut aliorum scripta super eadem re proferre. nemo huiusmodi habere libros et sacrilega scriptorum audeat monimenta servare. quod si qui in his criminibus fuerint deprehensi, perpetua deportatione dammentur*; cf. *Cod. Iust.* 1.1.3; 1.5.6 = *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.66: Nestorian books were to be burnt.

185 *Cod. Iust.* 1.5.8.12: *omnes vero huiuscemodi chartae ac libri, qui funestum Eutychetis, hoc est Apollinaris, fuerint dogma complexi, incendio concrementur*.

186 Similarly in a law by Justinian in 527: *Cod. Iust.* 1.1.5.3: *damnamus omnem haeresim, praesertim vero Nestorium ... necnon Eutychetem*.

187 *Cod. Iust.* 1.5.8.13; cf. *Cod. Iust.* 1.4.34.16; 1.55.

188 Specifically with regard to Severus of Antioch: *Novell. Iust.* 42; Euagr. *h.e.* 4.11.

As earlier intimated, the Manichaeans also counted among heretics.¹⁸⁹ The *Codex Justinianus* includes a law issued by Theodosius II and Valentinian III in 448: “Books in any way related to the ungodly error of the Manichaeans” were to be burnt and owners of such books to be punished.¹⁹⁰ Justinian had Manichaeism persecuted, resulting in its extinction in Byzantium. However, some writings were transmitted in medieval China.¹⁹¹ An early section of the *Codex Justinianus* repeated the laws, first ordained by Theodosius II in 448, to burn the writing of Nestorius and Porphyry.¹⁹² Some manuscripts have the addition: “whoever wrote against the Christian religion”,¹⁹³ perhaps an interpolation from the age of Justinian.¹⁹⁴

Similarly, the *Nomokanon of Fourteen Titles* (early seventh century), formerly attributed to Photius, provides a list of canon and imperial laws that deal expressly with the concealing of heretical books, a crime that was to be punished by expulsion. The collection indiscriminately ranks “writings against Christianity” alongside books of *mathematici*, books authored by non-conformist Christians, and Manichaean and “magic” books. If the “magic” books had been inherited, a judge could sentence their destruction (12.3).¹⁹⁵ These laws are listed alongside legislation dealing with the destruction of idols, temples and sacred trees. The original law in Justinian’s *Digest* specifies these as “books of prohibited content, perhaps magical or similar to such” rather than as magic books, thus leaving the judge to decide what was in the interest of orthodoxy.¹⁹⁶

In sum, in many of the aforementioned laws there is a terminological grey area between heretical and pagan and magical texts. The term “heretical” applied to any material, either pagan or Christian, that opposed the Christian world view. The term “magical” was similarly open to interpretation. This shows that, on one hand, censorship laws built on earlier precedents of Roman law, while on the other they provided a flexible interpretation of the question of which books were considered to be unlawful. In the next section we will see that this applies similarly to the enforcement of book-burning in this time period, illustrating the different kinds of text regarded as unlawful.

189 *Cod. Iust.* 1.5.12.2; *Cod. Iust.* 1.5.18.10.

190 *Cod. Iust.* 1.5.16.3: βιβλία τῇ πανταχόθεν ἀσεβεῖ τῶν Μανιχαίων πλάνῃ προσήκοντα.

191 See Lieu (1992), 214–16.

192 *Cod. Iust.* 1.1.3 (longer version: *ACO* 1.1.4:66).

193 *Cod. Iust.* 1.1.3.1: ἢ ἑτερός τις κατὰ τῆς εὐσεβοῦς τῶν Χριστιανῶν θρησκείας συνέγρψε.

194 Proposed by Neumann (1880), 8–9.

195 Pitra, *Iuris ecclesiastici graecorum historia et monumenta*, vol. 2 (1868), p. 604–5 = PG 104:872.

196 *Dig.* 10.2.4: in libris improbatae lectionis, magicis forte vel his similibus. haec enim omnia protinus corrumpenda sunt.

2.8 Religious Inquisitions in the Age of Justinian

Having established that these laws were promulgated, the question is to what degree were the relatively harsh book-laws of the *Codex Justinianus* actually enforced? Along with other sources, the anonymous *Life of Simeon Stylites the Younger* (521–592) provides us with evidence that the state authorities rigorously destroyed books in the age of Justinian. Alongside the destruction of cult statues and pagan artwork, they also destroyed non-conformist Christian books, magical and astrological books, and a range of pagan books – as part of a violent spectacle.¹⁹⁷ The text dates from the age of the emperor Justinian, in which book-burning is attested for comparatively often, but as it has not hitherto been translated into English I shall therefore provide extended quotations in analyzing the evidence it provides us. Especially during the age of Justinian a number of hagiographical texts exist which are historically inaccurate. I shall therefore compare the pertinent narrative of this text with parallel evidence, arguing that its narrative of book-burning indicates first-hand knowledge.

Simeon was a pillar saint near Antioch. As well as his miracles, the author of his *Life* reports of the persecutions carried out under Justinian. The text rarely refers directly to pagans or heretics as such, but instead makes use of different polemical terms. The people who suffered persecution are first introduced as “certain infidels from the city of Antioch” who were not willing to admit Christian doctrines. Among these were some who believed in astrology, others in fate, and others in Manichaeism. The text depicts them as sharing in common that “they are blasphemous because of their being carried away, in the vanity of their spirit, by the folly of their satanic error.”¹⁹⁸ It is likely that the author of this text used polemical terms because he was suspicious of Antioch’s upper strata of society. The text therefore illustrates the social tensions of that time.

The account of the persecution is preceded by a depiction of an instance of miracle-healing, indicating that the suppression of harmful ideas was seen as a medical cure. In this, an artisan in Antioch was cured of a lung disease following Simeon’s prayers and erected an image for Simeon in a public place. Subsequently, it accounts that “certain persons among the infidels” instigated others to smash the image to the ground: “They were thinking they had found the occasion to oppose and to harass the saint because he had repeatedly refuted the er-

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Trombley (1985), 225, note 53; Maas (1992), 71–2.

¹⁹⁸ *Vita Symeonis Stylitae Iunioris* 157: τινες ἀσεβεῖς ἄνδρες τῆς πόλεως Ἀντιοχείας ... ἐβλασφήμουν τῇ βακχείᾳ τῆς σατανικῆς πλάνης ἐν ματαιότητι τοῦ νοῦς αὐτῶν συναπαγόμενοι.

roneous belief of the pagans who were found among them.”¹⁹⁹ By chance the Spirit of God descended to a prostitute who exclaimed that such reproaches against Simeon will not go unpunished (158–9). Having heard the news, Simeon is shown as praying to God:²⁰⁰

Make a man rise over the heads of these infidels, destined to batter all the opinions they profess, in order to set the example, namely of those who have put their hope not in you but in the abundance of their riches, which cause their minds to stray into the practice of idolatry [idol worship], for they consider gold as their god.

The content and thrust of the prayer implies that paganism remained common in the upper echelons of society. The account goes on to state that Simeon, informed by the Holy Spirit, has foreseen that:²⁰¹

in Constantinople, in the palace of the emperor, there was a man invested with power, on whom had been conferred, under the action of the Spirit, a force great and strong in the government of the east, surpassing the authority of those who had been in charge before him.

It was the mission of this chief “to flog people until they die to terrify all human creatures.”²⁰² Based on this knowledge, Simeon explains that:²⁰³

a terrible chief will arrive to condemn the impiety and baseness of the atheists, and he will bring death to many of them through the direst castigation. [...] The idols in possession of these people will be searched out and brought into the public to be ridiculed. (160)

199 *Vita Symeonis Stylitae Iunioris* 158: τινες τῶν ἀπίστων ... καιρὸν νομίσαντες εὐρεῖν καταστασιάσαι καὶ καθυβρίσαι τὸν ἅγιον, ὥς πολλάκις ἐλέγξαντα τὴν κακοπιστίαν καὶ πλάνην τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐλληνιζόντων.

200 *Vita Symeonis Stylitae Iunioris* 160: ἐπιβίβασον οὖν ἄνθρωπον ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς τῶν ἀπίστων ἐκείνων, παραδειγματίζοντα πάντα ἅπερ αὐτοῖς φρονοῦσι μὴ ἡλικιώτερες ἐπὶ σοί, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τῷ πληθει τοῦ πλούτου αὐτῶν, ὅθεν καὶ διεφθάρη τὰ νοήματα αὐτῶν ἐν ἐπιτηδεύμασιν εἰδωλολατρείας, τὸν χρυσὸν θεὸν αὐτῶν ὑπάρχειν ἡγουμένων.

201 *Vita Symeonis Stylitae Iunioris* 160: ...ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει ἐν τῷ παλατίῳ τοῦ βασιλέως· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἀνὴρ τῆς δυνάμεως ἴστατο, ᾧ ἐδίδото ἐξουσία διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ἀρχῆς τῆς Ἐφῶς μεγάλη καὶ δυνατὴ ὑπὲρ τοὺς ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ ἄρχοντας εἰπόντος πρὸς αὐτόν.

202 *Vita Symeonis Stylitae Iunioris* 160: ὁ δὲ ἄρχων ἐκεῖνος ἔτυπτε κατὰ τῶν νώτων τῶν ἀνθρώπων τανυομένων, ἐπιτιθεῖς αὐτοῖς πληγὰς εἰς θάνατον ὥστε φρεῖναι πᾶσαν σάρκα.

203 *Vita Symeonis Stylitae Iunioris* 160: φοβερός ἄρχων ἐλεύσεται καὶ τὰς ἀσεβείας καὶ φανλοπραγίας τῶν ἀθέων διελέγξει καὶ πολλοὺς αὐτῶν ἐν βαρυτάταις τιμωρίαις ἀφανίσει. ... τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς εἰδώλων ἐρευνωμένων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ καταγελάστως φερομένων.

The narrative then states that just four months later, the prediction was fulfilled:²⁰⁴

After the saint [Simeon] had predicted all this, the chief, Amantius by name, arrived three months later, having put to death a high number of culprits searched out by him on his way, before he entered the city of Antioch, so that all people were terrified by his presence. For everywhere did he reprimand all misdeeds, from spoken word to deed, castigating almost to death all those who had strayed, to such an extent that henceforward even those whose conduct had been beyond reproach feared his presence. For he did away with every controversy, injustice, violence, and every infamous action, as much as he could in the entire East. After all this had happened, God approached his servant showing him also another vision, which he reported to us in this way: ‘A decision has been made by God against the pagans and the heterodox that this chief shall search out the error concerning idolatry, to collect all their books and to burn these in the fire.’ After Simeon had anticipated and announced the events, zeal for God overcame the chief, and after having conducted an inquisition, he found that the majority of the first citizens of the city and many of its inhabitants had been involved in paganism, Manichaeism, astrology, automatism [= Epicureanism]²⁰⁵, and other gruesome heresies. These he had detained, thrown in prison, and having brought together all of their books, which were a great many, he had these burnt in the middle of the stadium. He also had their idols along with the gruesome vessels collected and hung up in all the streets of the city, and their riches were wasted through many fines.

This passage links “idols” to books. It is clear that the purpose of this section is to demonstrate that both of Simeon’s visions came true. In his first vision, the Spirit had supplied Simeon with the knowledge that “the idols in possession

204 *Vita Symeonis Stylitae Iunioris* 161: ταῦτα πάντα προειπόντος τοῦ ἁγίου, εἴσω τετραμηνιαίου χρόνου παραγένονεν ὁ ἄρχων ἐκεῖνος, Ἀμάντιος ὄνομα αὐτῷ, ὃς καὶ πρὸ τοῦ εἰσελθεῖν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ Ἀντιόχῃ πόλει πολλοὺς τῶν ἀδίκων κατὰ τὰς ὁδοὺς εὐρηκῶς ἀπώλεσεν, ὥστε φρίζαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἀπὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ· πανταχῇ γὰρ πᾶσαν κακοπραγίαν ἀπὸ λόγου καὶ ἔως ἔργου ἀνέστειλεν, παιδεύων ἄχρι θανάτου τοὺς παραπίπτοντας, ὡς ἐντεῦθεν καὶ τοὺς ἐν ἀμέμπτῳ πολιτεία δεδιέναι τὴν παρουσίαν αὐτοῦ· περιεῖλε γὰρ ὡς δυνατόν ἦν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ἀνατολῇ πᾶσαν μάχην καὶ ἀδικίαν καὶ μάχαιραν καὶ πᾶσαν αἰσχροπραγίαν. τούτων τε οὕτως γενομένων, προσέθηκεν ὁ Θεὸς τοῦ δεῖξαι τῷ θεράποντι αὐτοῦ καὶ ἄλλην θεωρίαν, ἣν ἐξαγγείλας ἔφη πρὸς ἡμᾶς· “ἐξῆλθε,” φησὶν, “ἀπόφασις ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ κατὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ ἑτεροδόξων τοῦ ἐξευρεῖν τὸν ἄρχοντα τοῦτον τὴν τῶν ἀθέων περὶ τὴν εἰδωλολατρείαν πλάνην καὶ ἐπισυναγαγεῖν πάσας αὐτῶν τὰς βίβλους καὶ πυρὶ καῦσαι.” ταῦτα δὲ αὐτοῦ προεωρακότος καὶ ἀπαγγείλαντος, προσετέθη ἐκεῖνι τῷ ἄρχοντι ζῆλος Θεοῦ, καὶ ἐξερευνήσας ἦρε τοὺς πλείους τῶν πρώτων τῆς πόλεως καὶ πολλοὺς τῶν κατοικοῦντων αὐτὴν ἑλληνισμῶ καὶ μανιχαῖσμῶ καὶ ἀστρολογίαις καὶ αὐτοματισμῶ καὶ ἄλλαις δυσωνύμοις αἰρέσεσι κατεχομένους, οὓς συλλαβόμενος κατέκλεισεν ἐν δεσμητηρίοις, καὶ συναγαγὼν πάσας αὐτῶν τὰς βίβλους πολλὰς οὖσας σφόδρα κατέκαυσεν ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ σταδίου, καὶ τὰ εἰδῶλα αὐτῶν σὺν τοῖς μαρτοῖς σκευεῖσι προσενέγκας ἐκρέμασε κατὰ πάσης πλατείας τῆς πόλεως, καὶ ὁ πλοῦτος αὐτῶν ἐν πολλαῖς ζημίαις κατηναλώθη.

205 The term “automatism” (αὐτοματισμός), “self-movement” refers to “automatic working of natural forces, as explanation of universe”, as taught by the Epicureans: Lampe, *PGL*, 271.

of these atheists will be searched out.” In the second vision, again caused by the Spirit, the searches were conducted in order “to collect all their books.” To the author, the violent spectacle included the destruction of both cult statues and forbidden books. The public character of the book-burning, which took place in the stadium, as well as the exhibition of cult statues indicate that the inquisitors were not only interested in stopping the circulation of the material in question, but also in performing a ritual spectacle designed to instill fear in the population. The fines may have been particularly effective.

A second key point of this passage is that it presents a cohesive, culturally dominant Christian world view as a result of book-burning. In Simeon’s visions God continued to refute the pagans because more people were miraculously healed following the destruction of books (162). The author of the text thus apparently regarded book-burning as an effective tool to destroy the infectious demons contained in these books. Simeon further explains that those who were temporarily imprisoned during the persecution were interrogated by Amantius in a religious tribunal. In the rhetoric of the *Life*, below Amantius’ chair there was what seemed like a firmament, the fundament of which was made up by the sun, the moon, and the stars, all of which were controlled by the Spirit who had the power to make them shine or disappear (164). This vision shows that, to the author, the books were burnt to silence scientific approaches by superseding them with a model that put the stars and the planets under the power of the Holy Spirit, thus excluding the natural laws posited by natural philosophies. This is suggested because the genre of “automatism” (a Christian label with which to refer to self-movement of the universe, particularly as taught by Epicurean texts) was targeted among others in the book searches. This scene indicates that the author celebrated the destruction of texts as reversing the world order.

Although the author of the *Life* might not have been well informed on the contents of the destroyed books, his list of “paganism, Manichaeism, astrology, automatism, and other gruesome heresies” reflects the range of literary contents that were strongly disapproved of in sixth-century monastic communities. It is also apparent that the anonymous author of the *Life* assumed that such books were still in circulation, however limited. Evidence supports this as Epicureans (or “Automatists”) are still attested in the city of Harran (the ancient Carrhae) near Antioch for the eighth century, if we can trust Theophanes here.²⁰⁶ The re-

206 Theoph. AM 6241 (de Boor, 426): “He happened to be an adherent of the Epicureans or Automatists, an impiety he had received from the pagans who live in Harran.” (ἐτύγχανε δὲ τῆς τῶν Ἐπικουρείων ἤτοι Αὐτοματιστῶν αἰρέσεως, ἐκ τῶν οἰκούντων τὴν Χαρρᾶν Ἑλλήνων μεταλαβὼν τὴν ἀσέβειαν).

gion was Islamic then, and Harran soon became a centre for the mathematical sciences in the Islamic world. To be sure, neither source refers to actual Epicurean philosophers. Rather, the authors labelled contemporary pagan or heretical groups as “automatists”, probably alluding to philosophical traditions associated with the old philosophers. At any rate, it is clear that both authors associated these groups with the heretical opinion that the universe moves automatically rather than governed by divine providence.²⁰⁷

The catalogue of punishments makes it clear that although book-offences were prosecuted more harshly than in the previous century, execution was still not the norm. Punishments were inflicted on those “who had confessed to have committed a great number of gruesome crimes inspired by their impiety.”²⁰⁸ It is therefore unlikely such confessions were made voluntarily in view of the outcome. It would appear that torture was applied to extract a confession. This would explain not only Amantius’ reputation for flogging men until they died but also the terror that these acts and this reputation inspired in orthodox Christians, fear which may have led them to confess untruthfully in order to halt the tortures.

The graduated punishments included service in the hospice and schooling at monasteries in cases of clerics, while others were either exiled or sentenced to capital punishment. Out of the latter group, however, the majority of those who “admitted their ignorance and promised to repent” were released according to the order of the emperor without prosecution.²⁰⁹ At least one culprit found guilty of frequent acts of popular agitation was executed, however (164). But it generally appears that those who searched for books punished selectively, using the threat and example of punishment to deter others. With a view to the book-burning scenes depicted in the *Life of Severus* which will be discussed below, it is likely that those who were found keeping pagan books were released

207 The author of the *Life* clearly attests that Antioch’s pagans were interested not only in astrology and magic but also in the Epicurean view that the universe moves automatically without divine providence, and he does mention the Pythagorean view of the transmigration of souls, *Vita Symeonis Stylitae Iunioris* 157: Τινὲς γὰρ αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ἀστρολογίᾳ ἐπλανῶντο καὶ τὴν τῶν ἀστρῶν κίνησιν αἰτίαν ἐδόξαζον γίνεσθαι τῶν συμβαινόντων σεισμῶν, ἔνιοι δὲ μοιχείας καὶ ἀνδροφονίας καὶ λοιμικὰς φθορὰς ἐκ τῆς τούτων θέσεως ματαιῶς ὑπελάμβανον, καὶ ἄλλοι ἀπρονόητα νομίζοντες εἶναι τὰ πάντα αὐτοματισμὸν ἐφαντάζοντο, ἕτεροι Μανιχαϊκὸν φρόνημα ἔχοντες καὶ ἡπατημένοι τῇ ματαιότητι τοῦ νοῦς αὐτῶν μετεμψύχωσιν εἶναι ἔφρασκον, εἰμαρμένη τὴν γένεσιν καὶ τύχην ἐπιγράφοντες.

208 *Vita Symeonis Stylitae Iunioris* 164: πολλὰ καὶ δεινὰ ὁμολογήσαντας κακὰ ἐπὶ ταῖς ἑαυτῶν ἀσεβείαις διαπεπράχθαι.

209 *Vita Symeonis Stylitae Iunioris* 164: τοὺς δὲ πλείους αὐτῶν ἀγνοίαν προβαλλομένους καὶ μετανοεῖν ἐπαγγελλομένους ἀνεξετάστους ἐκ βασιλικῆς διατάξεως ἀπέλυσεν.

in exchange for denouncing others who kept such works, and their informing became a part of their repentance. This helps to explain why otherwise large number of books could be discovered and destroyed at once.

As to Amantius, the “chief”, he is apparently identical with a person of the same name who was *magister militum per orientem* in 555.²¹⁰ He was in office at the time of the Samaritan revolt at Caesarea in Palestine in July of 555, during which the *proconsul* Stephanus was killed. Amantius was placed in charge of putting down the revolt. He executed some of the rebels, mutilated others and confiscated their property. When word of this spread, people across the East came to fear Amantius.²¹¹ In the passages quoted above, he is more than once attested to have conducted similar inquisitions “in the whole East”, which suggests that pagan books were also burnt elsewhere under his command.²¹² Other sources attest that the religious policy against pagans (and especially astrologers) in the age of Justinian involved property-confiscation and torture.²¹³ Because their property was confiscated, it is reasonable to assume that Justinian, like others before him, was in want of money to finance his military campaigns.

Against the earlier study of Riedinger, the editor van de Ven suggests that the *Life of Simeon Stylites the Younger* is essentially trustworthy, considering the many details given by the author.²¹⁴ Amantius is well attested as having been in charge of religious trials during the time of the *Life*’s composition. Moreover, the *Codex Justinianus* ruled against pagans and against pagan teaching. Book-burning in the age of Justinian is also known from other sources. Shortly after the events narrated in the *Life of Simeon* a similar incident of book-burning occurred in Constantinople, which is reported first by John Malalas: “In the month of June in the same indiction Hellenes were arrested and paraded around, and

210 *PLRE* 3a, Amantius 2, 52–4.

211 Theoph. AM 6048; cf. Jo. Mal. *chron.* 18.54; Mich. Syr. 9.31 (Chabot 2:262); Jo. Mal. *chron.* 18.119 and fr. 48; Cedr. (Bekker 1:675); Ps.-Dion. *chron.* (Chabot 2:128).

212 *Vita Symeonis Stylitae Iunioris* 161: ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ἀνατολῇ. So too, van de Ven (1962), 168, note 2.

213 Procop. *arc.* 11.31: “[Justinian] then carried the persecution to the Greeks, as they are called, maltreating their bodies and plundering their properties” (Ἐντεῦθεν ἐπὶ τοὺς Ἕλληνας καλουμένους τὴν διώξιν ἤγεν αἰκίζόμενός τε τὰ σώματα καὶ τὰ χρήματα); punishments of astrologers mentioned in 11.37; and see 18.34. Similarly, Jo. Mal. *chron.* 18.42–3; Theoph. AM 6022 on the year 529/30.

214 Riedinger (1956), 93, had questioned the historicity of the event because the descriptions of miracle-healing reminded him of the book-burning scene in the Acts. Contra: van de Ven (1962), 169, note 3.

their books were burnt in the Kynegion, together with pictures and statues of their disgusting gods.”²¹⁵

The Kynegion was the place where criminals were publicly executed. That books were burnt here indicates that it was a public act, one intended to deter the population from acquiring or keeping them in future. This again suggests the ritual character of book-burning. The date of 562 as suggested by Stein is generally accepted.²¹⁶ It is therefore likely that the public burning of books, as with the case of Antioch probably in 555, ranks among similar events of persecution and book-burning. We have seen that Justinian issued laws against pagan teachers in 529 and shortly after. As early as for the year of 529, John Malalas reports of a “great persecution of Hellenes” who lost property and were removed from public office in the same manner as heretics.²¹⁷ If 555 is the correct date for the events described in the text, then there was a long delay between these events and probably no direct correlation. However, the events in Antioch could have been in line with a broader religious policy, also expressed in the Pragmatic Sanction of 554, as we have seen.

Pagans were coerced into conversion throughout the reign of Justinian and their books appear to have been burnt also. The holy man John of Ephesus reports that he allegedly converted 70,000 people to Christianity in Asia, Caria, Phrygia and Lydia on the order of Justinian in 542. He donated Christian books to the churches he built from the material of the temples he had demolished along with the altars and sacred trees.²¹⁸ John himself mentions only the book donations but no destructions. However, in the eleventh century, Michael the Syrian (based on earlier sources) briefly refers to the deeds of John and mentions book-burning in a list of noteworthy events for that time period. He puts “paganism” and “idolatry” as well as “books of magic” and “books of paganism” next to each other. Although it must be conceded that this text is late and unreliable, he indicates that “about 2,000” books were destroyed in Asia by John of Ephesus.²¹⁹ John of Ephesus writes that he supported Justinian in searching out pagan senators and aristocrats along with a “mass of grammarians, rhetoricians,

215 Jo. Mal. *chron.* 18.136: μηνὶ ἰουνίῳ, ἰνδικτιῶνι τῇ αὐτῇ, συσχεθέντες Ἕλληνες περιεβωμίσθησαν καὶ τὰ βιβλία αὐτῶν κατεκαύθη ἐν τῷ Κυνηγίῳ καὶ εἰκόνες τῶν μυσερῶν θεῶν αὐτῶν καὶ ἀγάλματα.

216 Stein (1968), 373, 399–400; Speyer (1981), 136 note 35; Jeffreys et al. (1986), ad locum.

217 Jo. Mal. *chron.* 18.42: διωγμὸς γέγονεν Ἑλλήνων μέγας.

218 Jo. Eph. *h.e.* 3.2.44; 3.36–7 (CSCO 106:81, 125–6); *de beat. orient.* 40; 43; 51 (PO 18:650; 659–60; 19:161–2); Jo. Eph. *h.e.* (Nau, 482); Mich. Syr. 9.24, 9.33 (Chabot 2:207–8, 270); cf. Cavallo (1978), 212, note 70; Noethlichs (1986) 1170–71.

219 Mich. Syr. 9.33 (Chabot 2:271).

lawyers and physicians” in 546. Similarly to Antioch nine years later, the arrested persons were tortured to denounce others, imprisoned, flogged, and sent to churches for conversion.²²⁰ Tortures may have been employed deliberately to identify and prosecute the owners of forbidden books. Although like many hagiographical accounts of this time period the text is tendentious and not necessarily to be taken at face value, it does indicate the general trend that book-burning was portrayed as an outcome of the social tensions at that time.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have investigated those forms of book-burning and censorship that were sanctioned or tolerated by the Roman authorities. While instances such as these can be seen as government sanctioned censorship, I have stressed that there was no systematic plan to ban certain genres of texts. Imperial censorship laws often reacted to specific conflicts or requests, and the initial scope of these laws was somewhat regionally and temporarily limited. Moreover, there is the question of whether or not these laws were enforced. While there is some evidence for legal enforcement of some of these laws and it is well possible that other instances are not recorded in the sources, it generally appears unlikely that religious laws of any kind were systematically enforced. The Roman state and provincial administration did not have the staff to put laws into effect immediately. On the other hand, Roman officials in Late Antiquity were required to react to denunciation, as we have seen. We will also see in the next chapter that these edicts gave the clergy some legal grounds for conducting book-searches, with or without asking the authorities for help.

I have also argued that there was a grey area concerning the range of books that were ordered to be destroyed or banned by imperial legislation and state authorities. After Constantine, there is further evidence of a number of laws being passed against aspects of paganism, notably against magicians, astrologers/*mathematici*, diviners and demon-worshippers. Implementing these laws, *defensores* served as a local religious police force in charge of enforcing the legislation and some laws suggest that their function was to oversee and enforce the burning of books. Since Constantine and especially under Valens laws on burning pamphlets were in effect. In promulgating these laws, emperors initially seem to have reacted to acute conflicts. State authorities under the emperor Valens seem to have confiscated and destroyed books in an effort to uncover a conspira-

²²⁰ Jo. Eph. *h.e.* (Nau, 481–2).

cy. In this incident book-burning and treason charges mostly targeted philosophers, but there is no indication that the clergy were involved. According to Ammianus, not only magical but also books on liberal arts were burnt during trials and whole libraries destroyed by their owners in the East out of fear. To at least one later pagan author, the episode appeared to be an anti-pagan pogrom directed specifically against philosophers, but this was likely a later interpretation.

Under the Theodosian dynasty book-burning laws continued to be issued against pamphlets but also against certain heretical writings and the books of astrologers/*mathematici* in 409. As attested by Augustine, this law was indeed enforced in North Africa. It was preceded by similar laws against heretical authors. Other laws under the Theodosian dynasty were directed against “false teachers” and certain enquiries into the nature of the world were rendered illegitimate. As this chapter has shown, there are various meanings of the term *mathematici* in the literary sources but the most common meaning in contexts of expulsion and banning was that of astrologers. On the other hand, the terms *mathematici* and *mathemata* were charged with a variety of meanings in the understanding of ecclesiastical authors of Late Antiquity, many of which can be traced to the philosophical opinions that I shall outline in greater detail in Chapter 4. In general, there is reason to believe that the polemical terms in Christian authors and imperial legislation influence each other. Educated Neoplatonists were occasionally accused of paganism as a treason charge, particularly if connected with divination and even subversive philosophical opinions, while Neoplatonists long continued to teach more or less undisturbed.

Similarly, it is evidenced that under Justinian pagans were barred from teaching, a law that appears to have also been in effect in the reconquered parts of the Western empire. Particularly in the age of Justinian, book-burning was staged as a ritual act. Persecution of pagans under Justinian involved book-burning – book-burning was even enforced systematically during this time period and included an unspecific range of pagan books, if we can trust texts such as the anonymous *Life of Simeon*. At least, descriptions of religious inquisitions found there are confirmed in other source material.

The general picture, then, is one of increased legislation and clamping down on certain avenues of thought, largely pre-Christian, but the evidence for legal enforcement is somewhat limited before the age of Justinian. Charges of magic and of paganism sometimes provided a convenient excuse for incriminating powerful individuals who would otherwise have been exempt from book-charges.

3 Holy Men, Clerics and Ascetics

Having examined the instances of book-burning by Roman authorities in response to imperial legislation, I shall now discuss this as a practice of zealous Christian groups. I align the term zealous Christians with monks, ascetics and holy men. Although drawn from various orders of society, the evidence suggests that those who carried out this practice were often from the lower strata. Unlike in the instances discussed in the previous chapter, these acts of book-burning were not immediately authorised by any government. We are thus dealing with a different kind of book-burning, in which the act itself has the character of a violent, spontaneous ritual rather than of an incident of state censorship. This chapter will also argue that after Christianity became the state religion, zealous Christians sometimes collaborated with state authorities to search out and destroy books. In addition to the previous chapter, it will discuss the potential impact that imperial censorship legislation may have had. While sources refer to these books often as magic books, there is evidence to suggest that a broader range of pagan books were banned and occasionally destroyed as a consequence of religious conflict. This chapter, then, will investigate when the concept and practice of book-burning and censorship-legislation first appeared in Christian texts of the early centuries. It will outline what genres of books were likely to be targeted by zealous Christians in Late Antiquity. I shall therefore have a closer look at the various links that existed between heresy, magic and ancient philosophy in Christian discourse, arguing that the former literatures were vulnerable to censorship in Late Antiquity. For the purpose of this book, this question is pertinent because imperial and ecclesiastical laws often attempted to ban heretical, magical and astrological writings from circulation. In the next section, I shall discuss the origins of book-burning as a ritual within early Christianity, arguing that individuals burnt books in order to destroy contagious demons and thus to provide miracle-healing.

3.1 Book-Burning in the Acts of the Apostles

Apart from its character as a ritual, the concept and practice of book-burning gained traction within Christianity because its monotheism demanded the exclusion of other gods. By contrast, pagan syncretism allowed for combining elements from different religious traditions. An example of this is the link between the Jupiter of the Romans and the Zeus of the Greeks. The Olympic gods that ancient texts referred to became recast in Christian texts as demons or devils inflict-

ing mental disorders on human beings.¹ We will see that fire was suitable to destroy these demons. In the Gospel of Mark, after his resurrection Jesus defined the apostolic mission as a battle against demons: “In my name shall they cast out devils.”²

The earliest recorded example of a Christian involved in book-burning is the apostle Paul in Ephesus in the mid-first century. This episode already establishes the link between book-burning, healing and the fight against demons. In the Acts of the Apostles Paul performed miracles in Ephesus, healing people through exorcism rather more successfully than other Jewish exorcists:³

And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts [*ta perierga*] brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

Many translations give *ta perierga* as “magical arts” rather than the more literal “curious arts.” The eighth-century Christian scholar Bede already interpreted the term as “magical arts.” This interpretation has been scrutinized by modern scholars, notably by Fögen.⁴ There are only two other attestations of the term and its derivative known from the New Testament. Neither refers clearly to magic.⁵ Even in other Greek texts there is little evidence to suggest that the term could mean magic, except in the magical papyri.⁶ Commentators on the Acts acknowledge this problem. While some consider the term *perierga* as connoting magic, others argue that it has a more general meaning associated with

1 Ps. 96:5; 1Cor. 10:14–21; Apoc. 9:20. On demons, Schweizer et al. (1976), Flint (1999), Kahlos (2007), 172–84. Book-burning in the Old Testament: Jer. 36:20–26.

2 Mark 16:15–18, at 17: ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου δαιμόνια ἐκβαλοῦσιν. The canonicity of the passage is debated. Cf. Ath. *gent.* 1.1.3; 1.15.2: poets and other authors wrote about the immorality of demons that needed to be exorcised.

3 Acts 19:18–19: πολλοί τε τῶν πεπιστευκότων ἤρχοντο ἐξομολογούμενοι καὶ ἀναγγέλλοντες τὰς πράξεις αὐτῶν. ἱκανοὶ δὲ τῶν τὰ περίεργα πραξάντων συνενέγκαντες τὰς βίβλους κατέκαιον ἐνώπιον πάντων, καὶ συνεψήφισαν τὰς τιμὰς αὐτῶν καὶ εὗρον ἀργυρίου μυριάδας πέντε.

4 Bede, *super Acta apost. expos.* 19 (CCSL 121:78). Fögen (1993), 299–300 referring to *curiositas/curiosus* in Cicero, Seneca and Tertullian. And see Werner (2007), 144–50, too.

5 2Thess. 3:11; 1Tim. 5:13.

6 Bauer (1958), 1282, gives as the only near-contemporary attestation for *Sachen zur Zauberei gehörig* Plut. *Alex.* 2.8. This is not specifically related to magic. The other attestations quoted (Vett. *Val.* Index; Aristaenet. *ep.* 2.18, Mazal, 93) are from the fifth and sixth century respectively. He also refers to Deissmann (1895), 5, note 5, who gives two instances of derivatives in the late antique *Pap. Lugd.* J 384 XII.19 and 21 (Dieterich, 816). *PMag* 12.404 (Preisendanz 2:83) is the *locus classicus* for the term attested as magic.

syncretism – the merging of different traditions in paganism.⁷ Later sources, as we have seen, often appear to employ the term *períerga* with regard to philosophical studies or literature. On the other hand, the Acts of the Apostles twice refer to magic but as *mageía*.⁸ This suggests that the Acts have a clear-cut terminology of magic, one that differs from that described by the books burnt in Ephesus. This is also true for other books of the New Testament, written by different authors. The biblical Book of Revelation, for example, uses *pharmakeía* to refer to the magical arts.⁹ The cited figure for the value of the books burnt is probably exaggerated even given the status of Ephesus as the metropolis of Asia. This figure is supposed to demonstrate the effectiveness of Christianity in the context of miracle-healing. Yet in order to appear realistic, the total probably included books that were not strictly magical.

No other incidents of Christians involved in book-burning are firmly attested for the first two centuries and overall the evidence for conflict between Christians and the Roman state is scanty. Religious symbols, such as temples and statues, and ancient philosophy, already condemned and ridiculed by early Christian apologists as immoral, contradicting the Bible, and inspired by demons and believing in fate, could have been potential points of conflict.¹⁰ Minucius Felix was a well-educated early Christian apologist in Rome. His dialogue between a Christian and pagan about the true religion attempted to convince contemporary Christians that demons dwelt in statues, images and theatres, were active agents in sacrifice and divination and had been embraced by the ancient philosophers. It was these demons, Minucius Felix's Christian protagonist argued, that led pagans to hate Christians.¹¹ By contrast, the pagan adversary in his dialogue is shown commending the decision of the Athenians to burn the writings of Protagoras, who argued against religion in the fifth century BC. The implication is clear: Christians deserved even less tolerance than philosophers like Protagoras.¹² Attitudes such as these are bellwethers for the later Christian practice of banning books.

⁷ Comprehensive discussion with further literature: Pervo (2009), 479–81 in favour of the magic theory; contra: Shauf (2005), 227–31.

⁸ Acts 8:9; 8:11; 13:6.

⁹ *Vel sim.*: Apoc. 9:21; 18:23; 21:8; 22:15.

¹⁰ Just. 1 *apol.* 2, 4–5. Tat. *orat.* 1–14, 25–7, 30. And see *Did.* 11.2 too (warning against false teachers).

¹¹ Min. Fel. 27–8, 38.

¹² Min. Fel. 8.

3.2 Ecclesiastical Law in Late Antiquity

While there is no evidence that any such exhortation was put into action, the writings of early Christian authors of this apologetic-polemical type were influential in the formation of canon law. Indeed, many Christian writers also wrote ecclesiastical laws and monastic rules. In this section, I shall therefore explore the pertinent canons, arguing that there was an overlap in the application of the terms “heretical” and “pagan.”

Some canons in ecclesiastical law of the fourth and fifth century attempted to bar Christians from reading any pagan books, notably the injunctions of the *Apostolic Constitutions*:¹³

Stay clear of all pagan books! For what do you have to do with such foreign discourses, or laws, or false prophets, which subvert the faith of the unstable? What is missing in the law of the Lord that you go for those pagan myths? If you wish to go through history, you have the Books of Kings; if philosophy and poetry, you have the Prophets, the Book of Job and the Proverbs, in which you will find greater depth of sagacity than in all of the pagan poets and philosophers because this is the voice of the Lord, the only wise God; if you desire to sing, you have the psalms; if you wish to read about the origin of the world, you have the Book of Genesis; if laws and orders, you have the approved law of the Lord God: do therefore always stay clear of all such strange and diabolical books!¹⁴

The *Apostolic Constitutions* were originally compiled in Greek in late fourth-century Syria and purported to originate directly from the apostles. In reality the law probably emerged from a third-century Syriac tradition. Gemeinhardt is probably right to interpret the text's laws as pertaining generally to educated Church members, as the constitutions themselves are addressed to the laity.¹⁵ Brox therefore interpreted the law as a *Totalverbot* that required the clergy to enforce the ban on pagan books that might otherwise jeopardise the Christian faith.¹⁶ At any rate, it is worth noting

13 *Const. App.* 1.6.1–2 (SC 320:116): τῶν ἐθνικῶν βιβλίων πάντων ἀπέσχου. τί γὰρ σοὶ καὶ ἀλλοτρίοις λόγοις ἢ νόμοις ἢ ψευδοπροφητίας, ἃ δὴ καὶ παρατρέπει τῆς πίστεως τοὺς ἐλαφροὺς; τί γὰρ σοὶ καὶ λείπει ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἵνα ἐπ' ἐκεῖνα τὰ ἐθνόμυθα ὀρμήσῃς; εἴτε γὰρ ἱστορικὰ θέλεις διέρχεσθαι, ἔχεις τὰς Βασιλείους· εἴτε σοφιστικά καὶ ποιητικά, ἔχεις τοὺς Προφῆτας, τὸν Ἰώβ, τὸν Παροιμιστήν, ἐν οἷς πάσης ποιήσεως καὶ σοφιστείας πλείονα ἀγχίνοιαν εὐρήσεις, ὅτι Κυρίου τοῦ μόνου σοφοῦ Θεοῦ φθογγαί εἰσιν. εἴτε ἁσματικῶν ὀρέγῃ, ἔχεις τοὺς Ψαλμοὺς· εἴτε ἀρχαιογονίας, ἔχεις τὴν Γένεσιν· εἴτε νομίμων καὶ παραγγελιῶν, τὸν ἐνδοξον Κυρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ Νόμον.

14 *Const. App.* 1.6.6 (SC 320:116): πάντων οὖν τῶν ἀλλοτρίων καὶ διαβολικῶν ἰσχυρῶς ἀπόσχου.

15 Gemeinhardt (2007), 316–17.

16 Brox (1981), 269.

that the *Apostolic Constitutions* voiced particular concerns about books opposed to creation, regardless of whether these are mythological or rational.

Their claim of apostolic origin gained attraction in later monastic and ecclesiastical legislation. Basil of Caesarea's monastic rule prohibited the reading of pagan literature in monastic schools and the council of Carthage in 398 attempted to enforce that bishops read no pagans books at all and heretical books only if necessary for refutation.¹⁷ It is doubtful, however, that most educated Christians, clerics or laypeople, fully complied with these laws. Many pagan texts long remained a useful tool for rhetorical training.

Canon law often ruled against the writings of certain heretics. In the next section we will see that influential Christian authors often equated heresy with philosophical traditions that were opposed to the Christian world view. This is significant because searches for heretical books could also involve the destruction of other books, as canon law indicates.¹⁸ Thus Rabbula, a Syrian bishop of the early fifth century, ordered his monks: "Search out the books of the heretics and their book containers in every place, and wherever you can, either bring them to us or burn them in the fire" (can. 50).¹⁹ In this context, Rabbula prescribed that heretics (can. 49) and pagans (can. 52: "those who are tempted by demons") were to be barred from communion, listing book-burning alongside the eradication of temple remnants and sacred trees.²⁰ It is not known whether this order was enforced, but because the law is addressed to a specific group of clerics it is likely that it was.

As the Church historian Sozomenus wrote, each Christian group used only documents favouring their own heresy, omitting those of others.²¹ In high-profile cases this general rule was enforced through outright book-burning. For example, the acts of the council of Ephesus in 431 forbade Nestorius' books to be read and transcribed. Nestorius had argued that Mary was the mother of Jesus rather than the mother of God. Because his position occasioned a major schism, the law ordered that his books were publicly to be burnt in order to prevent this interpretation, and any favourable memory of it or the author, surviving.²² The

¹⁷ Bas. *reg. br.* 292 (PG 31:1288B). See Klein (2001), 98–9. And on Carthage see section 5.5 below.

¹⁸ So too, Speyer (1981), 144.

¹⁹ *Rules of Rabbūlā* can. 50 (Vööbus, 48).

²⁰ *Rules of Rabbūlā* can. 53 (Vööbus, 48–9).

²¹ Soz. *h.e.* 1.1.

²² ACO 1.3:181. This is an extended version of a law by Theodosius II; cf. *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.66 = *Cod. Iust.* 1.5.6. Another example is the first Sirmian creed (351): Socr. *h.e.* 2.30.48; Soz. *h.e.* 4.6.

public nature of the burning was meant as a demonstration of power and statement of intent as much as an effort to stop these writings from circulating. Apart from a Syriac translation of one of his works, Nestorius' writings now only remain in fragments quoted in refutations by his adversaries, although they may well have continued to circulate at that time. On the other hand, book-bans were not always limited to specific authors. The second council of Constantinople in 553 anathematised certain non-conformist Christian authors "along with their impious writings" and "all other heretics."²³

We have also seen that shortly before he did the same with Christian books Diocletian ordered Manichaean books to be burnt. Manichaeans were frequently persecuted in both parts of the empire throughout Late Antiquity. While their books were probably burnt at various occasions, there is explicit evidence of book-burning taking place in Rome in the fifth and sixth centuries. In 443, for example, Pope Leo the Great had the Manichaeans persecuted and "large bulks" of books in their possession burnt.²⁴

3.3 Philosophy and Heresy

Christian authors often regarded ancient philosophical traditions as the seed of heresy, as Epiphanius, for example, did in his *Panarion*. My argument is that, when heretical texts became outlawed, this means that some philosophical traditions became frowned upon too. Monks and ascetics may even have destroyed philosophical texts alongside with heretical ones, as we have just seen. I shall therefore present passages in which philosophies are put alongside or equated with heretical teaching.

A striking example is the treatise *On the False Prophets, the False Teachers, the Impious Heretics, and the Signs of the Perfection of this Age* (PG 59:553–68). Although this work is attributed to John Chrysostom, it was probably composed later by a different author, perhaps centuries after John's death. The author explains he wrote this piece in order to expel those "enemies of Christ" that teach false doctrines, just as wolves should be separated from sheep.²⁵ It notes that their end had been foretold unanimously by all the prophets:²⁶

²³ *Conc. univ. Constant. actio* 8 can. 11 (ACO 4.1:218 Latin, 242 Greek).

²⁴ Prosper *chron. ad ann. 443* (MGH Auct. ant. 9:479): *incensis eorum codicibus, quorum magnae moles fuerunt interceptae*. Other incidents: *Lib. pontif.* 51.1; 53.5; 54.9 (MGH Gesta pontificum Romanorum 1:116, 122, 130).

²⁵ Chrys. *pseud.* 6 (PG 59:560): ὁ πρῶτος ἐν αἰρέσει, ὁ μαθητὴς τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου καὶ πρόδρομος.

For where now are they who had once battled the Church, the kings, rulers, and the wise? Have they not all been scattered, perished, and passed into nothing? [...] Where is Marcion, where Valens, where Mani, where Basilides, where Nero, where Julian, where Arius, where Nestorius, where are all the enemies of truth, concerning whom the Church exclaims: 'Many dogs have surrounded me'? [Ps. 22:16] Have not all these perished? For they have been scattered because of their blasphemy and they have been expelled just like wolves.

The two pagans mentioned in this catalogue alongside heretical authors are the emperors Nero and Julian, of whom only Julian is known to have left writings. The author of the treatise therefore did not make a clear distinction between Christian and pagan heretics. The text also issues a warning against those who are Christians by name but, according to the psalm (106:35), have "mixed themselves among the pagans and learned their deeds." In other words, they have "devoted themselves to Jewish and Greek myths, genealogies, mantic, astrology." The text goes on to say that Christians who have been influenced by pagan deeds are even worse than pagans, and should be considered not worthy to approach the divine mysteries, and not named Christians, just like a virgin is not to be named any more as such after she has been "deceived." The warning is explicit: "watch out, o brother, and beware hereafter of pagan deeds!"²⁷ This text is a pertinent and prime example of an extremely hostile Christian discourse against everything pagan, and also one that condemns non-conformist Christians who may have been influenced by various aspects of paganism.

In a passage from his sermons on the Gospel of John (given in Constantino-ple), John Chrysostom links ancient philosophy as a whole to heresy, giving instruction on how to deal with someone bringing up philosophical arguments, how to avoid to agree to them and thus to sin. The sermon was probably designed to be addressed to clerics, particularly monks. He suggests that the individual simply laughs at any "heretic" employing Greek wisdom before cursing it as dust and ashes, and an open sepulchre full of worms. John discourages his audience from making contact with "heretics", arguing that they owe much to pagan philosophers in their thinking, notably their argument that matter is un-

26 Chrys. *pseud.* 5–6 (PG 59:559, quotation at PG 59:560): ποῦ γάρ εἰσιν οἱ ποτε τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν πολεμήσαντες, βασιλεῖς καὶ δυνάσται καὶ σοφοί; οὐχὶ διεσκορπίσθησαν καὶ ἀπώλοντο, καὶ ἐγένοντο εἰς οὐδέν; ... ποῦ Μαρκίων, ποῦ Οὐάλης, ποῦ Μάνης, ποῦ Βασιλίδης, ποῦ Νέρων, ποῦ Ἰουλιανός, ποῦ Ἄρειος, ποῦ Νεστόριος, ποῦ πάντες οἱ ἀντιτασσόμενοι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, περὶ ὧν ἐβόα ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ὅτι "Ἐκύκλωσάν με κύνες πολλοί;" οὐχὶ πάντες ἀπώλοντο; διεσκορπίσθησαν γὰρ διὰ τὴν βλασφημίαν αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐξεδιώχθησαν ὡς λύκοι.

27 Chrys. *pseud.* 7 (PG 59:561): ἐμίγησαν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσι, καὶ ἔμαθον τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν ... Ἰουδαίκοις καὶ Ἑλληνικοῖς προσέχοντες μύθοις, καὶ γενεαλογίαις, καὶ μαντείαις, καὶ ἀστρολογίαις ... (PG 59:562): ὄρα, ἀδελφέ, καὶ φύλαξον τοῦ λοιποῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνικῶν πραγμάτων.

created. John's argument is that he does not want his audience to engage with these people in case they become convinced by their arguments. Only the better educated Christians, such as himself, should enter such contests.²⁸ In John's sermons it is thus a recurrent theme to suggest that philosophical controversies themselves are clear proof of the presence of the devil because Christianity as the true philosophy is uncontroversial, whereas philosophers are based on several sources, and that heretics are close to philosophers because they introduce controversial opinions to Christianity.²⁹ The purpose of this theme is to demonise philosophical traditions and to cast doubt on the worthiness of their survival.

John also agrees with the view of earlier Christian apologists that the various ancient philosophies were the origin of heresy among Christians. Thus, in his piece *On the Holy Spirit*, John polemicizes against non-conformist Christian groups, such as the Macedonians, the Arians, and Montanists, admonishing that one should speak only what Jesus has spoken of. By contrast, heretics are said to be moved by the pagan teachings of Plato and of Aristotle.³⁰ Such conflation is notable in that they show how disparate concepts begin to be welded into an indivisible line of argument against non-Christian works. Aristotle's philosophy, for example, is said to be the seed of heresy,³¹ but so too is the belief that human beings are a species of animals.³² John is clearly voicing an extremist opinion here. As evidence of their pernicious nature, John suggests that there are non-conformist Christians doubting the actuality of resurrection because of their acquaintance with Greek philosophy, apparently because of its different understanding of matter. In short, John is essentially saying that anyone who raises questions is not to be counted among the faithful.³³ Similarly, in a treatise written in Antioch John considers discussions on fate, foreknowledge based on what he thinks is "the irrational motion of the stars", and the origin of evil as diseases and particularly the latter aspect as the origin of heretical ideas, such as by Marcion, the Manichaeans, Valentinus and Greek philosophers.³⁴ John therefore describes contemporary heretics (which could be a label for either pagans or Chris-

²⁸ Chrys. *hom.* 66 in *Jo.* 3 (PG 59:369–70).

²⁹ Chrys. *hom.* 1 in *Mt.* 2–4 (PG 57:16–18); *hom.* 7 in *1. Cor.* 4 (PG 61:60); *de verbis apostoli* 1.2–3, 5 (PG 51:274–6); *hom.* 13 in *Gen.* 2 (PG 53:106).

³⁰ Chrys. *spir.* (PG 52:823); Similar polemics against pagan literature as producing heresies, *de Lazaro concio* 3.2–3 (PG 48:994–6).

³¹ Chrys. *hom.* in *Jo.* 1:1, 3 (PG 63:548).

³² Chrys. *stat.* 11.2 (PG 49:121–2).

³³ Chrys. *hom.* 7 in *1 Thess.* 1–2 (PG 62:435–7).

³⁴ Chrys. *oppugn.* 3.10 (PG 47:365): ἄστρον ἀλόγῳ φορᾷ.

tians) borrowing arguments from various ancient philosophies. Insofar as their views contradict core aspects of Christianity, such as resurrection and divine providence, he proposes that these arguments are detrimental to the unity of Christianity and needed to be gotten rid of. As Christianity became the state religion, people who borrowed from ancient philosophies were likely felt to be heretics rather than pagans.

Half a century later, Theodoret of Cyrrhus offers a similarly derisive picture on pagan philosophers. Theodoret penned what is considered to be the last apologetic-polemical work of Antiquity, the *Treatment of Greek Diseases*, between 427 and 437 in the Antioch area.³⁵ The bishop of Cyrrhus and author of a Church history, in this text Theodoret appropriated Platonic philosophy to Christianity and addressed contemporary educated pagans.³⁶ Although to some extent Hellenism continued in Syria, to Theodoret Christian views and writings had largely replaced the various philosophical schools by this point because most people were now only interested in Christianity. His implication is that contemporary learned pagans are few and, while the truth of Christianity can be shown from some philosophers, ancient and Christian philosophies are generally opposed to one another.³⁷

All the heralds of the truth, the prophets and apostles I mean, stood aloof from the Greek eloquence. They were, however, full of true wisdom and they brought the divine doctrine to all nations, the Greeks and the barbarians, and filled all earth and sea with books on virtue and piety. All people now, having rejected the antics of the philosophers, gloat over the teachings of the fishermen and of the publicans and venerate the books of the shoemaker [Paul]. They do not even know the names of the Italic, Ionic and Eleatic schools, for time has done away with their memory...

That Theodoret adopts an eloquent Greek style in his treatise is, then, essentially to cut his adversaries with their own sword.³⁸ Indeed, he notes that by contrast to

35 Allusions to the *Curatio* are found in Thdt. *ep.* 113 (PG 83:1317A); 116 (PG 83:1325A); 145 (PG 83:1377B). Canivet (1958), SC 57:28–31, suggests a date before the council of Ephesus in 431.

36 Thdt. *affect.* pr. 2.

37 Thdt. *affect.* 5.60–61: καὶ γὰρ ἅπαντες τῆς ἀληθείας οἱ κήρυκες, προφηταὶ φημι καὶ ἀπόστολοι, τῆς μὲν Ἑλληνικῆς οὐ μετέλαχον εὐγλωττίας, ἔμπλεοι δὲ τῆς ἀληθινῆς ὄντες σοφίας, πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσι, καὶ Ἑλληνικοῖς καὶ βαρβαρικοῖς, τὴν θεῖαν διδασκαλίαν προσήνεγκαν καὶ πᾶσαν γῆν καὶ θάλατταν τῶν ἀρετῆς πέρι καὶ εὐσεβείας συγγραμμάτων ἐνέπλησαν. καὶ νῦν ἅπαντες τῶν φιλοσόφων τοὺς λήρους καταλιπόντες τοῖς τῶν ἀλιέων καὶ τελωνῶν ἐντρυφῶσι μαθήμασι καὶ τὰ τοῦ σκυτοτόμου συγγράμματα περιέπουσι καὶ τῆς μὲν Ἰταλικῆς καὶ Ἰωνικῆς καὶ Ἑλεατικῆς ξυμμορίας οὐδὲ τὰς προσηγορίας ἐπίστανται – ἐξήλειψε γὰρ αὐτῶν ὁ χρόνος τὴν μνήμην.

38 Thdt. *affect.* pr. 3.

the eloquence of contemporary Christians, the style of his adversaries is now pathetic and the knowledge of their heretical philosophical schools of the past lost:³⁹

We pity their temerity, because on the one hand, they know that barbarians have surpassed the skill of Greek eloquence, those elaborately decorated fables have been utterly banned and the solecisms [errors] of the fishermen have destroyed the Attic syllogisms [arguments], while on the other they do not blush nor hide away, but impudently fight for the cause of their error. They are so few that one can easily calculate them. They lack the Greek harmony of style but barbarise, as it were, whenever they speak. They consider it the highest education and glory of speech to invoke ‘the gods’ and ‘the sun’ and to smear other such vows in their speech. If I am not right, then tell me who succeeded Xenophanes of Colophon, Parmenides of Elea, Protagoras and Melissus, Pythagoras or Anaxagoras, Speusippus or Xenokrates, Anaximander or Anaximenes, Arcesilaus or Philolaus in their heresy? Who is today’s head of the Stoic heresy? Who is safeguarding the teachings of the Peripatetics? [...] For the whole earth under the sun has been filled with sermons.

Theodoret sarcastically suggests that contemporary pagan rhetoric is different to Christian rhetoric largely because of its use of invocation formulae to gods, indicating that contemporary pagans have insufficient knowledge of their literary patrimony. He could be right as far as most of the authors and schools mentioned in this extract are concerned.⁴⁰ Like John Chrysostom, Theodoret takes this loss of knowledge to show the superiority of Christianity and to ridicule contemporary pagans (whom he otherwise involves in a dialogue). This passage is interesting because it clearly counts a number of philosophical schools among the heresies, however, excluding the writings of Plato and Aristotle from this verdict. These two philosophical schools continued to be studied throughout Late

39 Thdt. *affect.* 5.64–6: ἡμεῖς δὲ αὐτῶν τὴν ἐμπληξίαν ὀλοφυρόμεθα, ὅτι δὴ ὁρῶντες βαρβαροφώνους ἀνθρώπους τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν εὐγλωττίαν νενικηκότας, καὶ τοὺς κεκομψευμένους μύθους παντελῶς ἐξεληλαμένους, καὶ τοὺς ἀλιευτικούς σολοικισμοὺς τοὺς Ἀττικούς καταλελυκότας ξυλλογισμούς [cf. Aug. *ord.* 2.4.13], οὐκ ἐρυθριῶσιν οὐδ’ ἐγκαλύπτονται, ἀλλ’ ἀνέδην ὑπερμαχοῦσι τῆς πλάνης, καὶ ταῦτα ὀλίγοι ὄντες καὶ ἀριθμηθῆναι ῥαδίως δυνάμενοι καὶ οὐδὲ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς εὐστομίας μετέχοντες, ἀλλὰ τοσαῦτα, ὥς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, βαρβαρίζοντες ὅσα φθέγονται, παιδευσιν δὲ ἄκραν καὶ λαμπρότητα λόγων ὑπολαμβάνοντες, εἰ ὁμνύντες εἵποιεν “μὰ τοὺς θεοὺς” καὶ “μὰ τὸν ἥλιον”, καὶ τοιούτους τινὰς τοῖς λόγοις ἐπιπλάττειν ὅρκους. εἰ δὲ οὐκ ἀληθῆ λέγω, εἴπατε, ὦ ἄνδρες, τίνα Ξενοφάνη ὁ Κολοφώνιος ἔσχε διάδοχον τῆς αἵρέσεως; τίνα δὲ Παρμενίδην ὁ Ἐλεάτης; τίνα Πρωταγόραν καὶ Μελίσσον; τίνα Πυθαγόραν ἢ Ἀναξαγόραν; τίνα Σπεύσιππον ἢ Ξενοκράτην; τίνα Ἀναξίμανδρον ἢ Ἀναξίμενην; τίνα Ἀρκεσίλαον ἢ Φιλόλαον; τίνας τῆς Στωϊκῆς αἵρέσεως προστατεύουσιν; τίνας τοῦ Σταγειρίτου τὴν διδασκαλίαν κρατύνουσιν; ... πᾶσα γὰρ ἡ ὑφήλιος τῶνδε τῶν λόγων ἀνάπλεως.

40 Similarly, Thdt. *affect.* 1.18.

Antiquity and beyond, whereas many, but not all of the other philosophies (such as the Pythagorean and Stoic) had long gone lost.

Writing in the early fifth century, Cyril of Alexandria in a Bible commentary also links Greek philosophy to heresy and punishments.⁴¹ Christians, Cyril argues elsewhere, should avoid non-conformist and certain pagan teachings: they should uphold the tradition of the Church, “despise the Greek talk of the heretics and turn away from the haphazard fables.”⁴²

Prudentius and Augustine are further examples of Christian authors who establish this link occasionally throughout their works. This is clear in their treatment of the motif of the vine and the branches that appears, for example, in Prudentius’ apologetic poem, the *Divinity of Christ (Apotheosis)*, in the context of burning of heresy, in accordance with the general theme of the *Apotheosis*, a poem that refutes heretical opinions. It is worth having a look at the parable of the vine and the branches from the Gospel of John that underlies this motif:⁴³

I am the vine; you are the branches. He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit, for without me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

To summarise the immediate context, in this work’s preface Prudentius refers to the “enemy” (41: *hostis*) and to the “slanderers” (25: *sycophantae*), who lead Christians into heresy through logical arguments (24: *sylogismi*). These people can be identified both as heretics (who use philosophical arguments perceived as opposed to arguments based on the gospels) and also non-Christian philosophers, as Prudentius polemicizes broadly against philosophers who have put forward arguments disagreeing with Christianity (200–214: Plato, the Cynics and Aristotle; 782ff.: Epicurean concept of causation). Like John Chrysostom, Prudentius deploys Paul’s letter to the Corinthians in this context: “God has therefore chosen the foolish things of the world to cut the sophisticated arguments into pieces.”⁴⁴ Prudentius attributes their error to their tongue (*lingua*), a metaphor that recurs throughout his work:⁴⁵

⁴¹ Cyr. *commentarius in Joelem prophetam* 2.3.39 (PG 71:393A–B).

⁴² Cyr. *hom. pasch.* 8.1 (PG 77:556D): τὰ δὲ γραῶν τῶν αἵρετικῶν διαπτύων ῥημάτια, καὶ τοὺς μὲν εἰκαίους ἐκτρεπόμενος μύθους (based loosely on Titus 3:9).

⁴³ Vet. Lat. John 15.5–6 Jülicher: *ego sum vitis vos palmites. qui manet in me et ego in illo, hic adferet fructum copiosum, quia sine me nihil potestis facere. si quis autem in me non manserit, praecisus est sicut palmes et missus est foras et aruit, et colligent eos et in ignem mittunt et ardent.* (Prudentius read the Bible in the pre-Hieronymian Latin version).

⁴⁴ Prud. *apoth.* pr. 29–30: *idcirco mundi stulta delegit Deus, | ut concidant sophistica.*

They challenge the nature of almighty God in plotted controversies and cut the faith in pieces with subtle ambiguities in proportion to the wickedness of their tongues [...] Although they produce poisonous juice, the farmer suffers them to grow into a plant, in order to avoid that perhaps the rooting out of the vain stem kill at the same time the stalk that bears the crop. He therefore waits until ripening summer heat mature the vicious plants and the wheat, that he may store in his barns what the hoe selects and burn the chaff in the fire.

Prudentius' metaphorical reference to burning here is closer to a verse in the Gospel of Matthew rather than the Gospel of John: "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers: 'Gather together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.'"⁴⁶ Because of this contiguity, I would argue that the picture Prudentius conjures up is to specifically suggest pruning the philosophical tradition so that it fits in with Christianity and does not cause trouble to it by generating heresy. It illustrates the unwillingness of Christian scribes and scholars to preserve texts that disagreed with Christian orthodoxy. It is clear from the following context that Prudentius alludes to false teachings that are not restricted to heresies.

This passage on the vine and the branches should be read alongside Augustine's treatment of the motif. The concept of Christianity as a fruitful vine is found in a treatise instructing those who are about to convert, including grammarians and rhetoricians, the teachers of higher learning, whose libraries needed to be inspected for Christian conformism.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Prud. *apoth.* pr. 19–22, 47–54: *statum lacesunt omnipollentis Dei | calumniosis litibus, | fidem minutis dissecant ambagibus | ut quisque lingua est nequior ... quas de veneni lacte in herbam fertiles | patitur colonus crescere, | ne forte culmum fibra inanis spiceum | simul revulsa intermecet. expectat ergo dum vitiosa et farrea | fervens coquat maturitas, | det ventilabro lecta quaeque ut horreis, urit recrementum focis.* Cf. *apoth.* 55–70: God burns the blood-stained fruits and c.Symm. 1, pr. 69–72: *dum virgas steriles atque superfluas | flammis de fidei palmitibus concremant, | ut concreta vagis vinea crinibus | silvosi inluviem poneret idoli.* The motif of the wicked tongue appears frequently in the Romanus hymn, but also in the *Apotheosis* in regard to Manichaeans: "Shut up, you madman. Bite your own tongue, you wicked dog, while devouring your words in your lacerated palate." (*apoth.* 979–80: *obmutesce, furor; linguam, canis inprobe, morde | ipse tuam, lacero consumens verba palato.*)

⁴⁶ Vet. Lat. Matt. 13:30 Jülicher: *sed sinite utraque crescere usque ad messem; et in tempore messis dicam messoribus: colligite primum zizania et alligate ea fasciculos ad comburendum, triticum autem congregate in horreum meum.*

⁴⁷ Aug. *catech. rud.* 24.44: *sed illa vitis quae per orbem terrarum, sicut de illa prophetatum et ab ipso domino praenuntiatum erat, fructuosos palmities diffundebat, tanto pullulabat amplius, quanto uberiore martyrum sanguine rigabatur. quibus per omnes terras innumerabiliter pro fidei veritate morientibus, etiam ipsa persequentia regna cesserunt et ad Christum cognoscendum atque*

But the vine which was spreading abroad its fruitful branches throughout the world, as had been prophesied concerning it, and as had been foretold by the Lord himself, flourished the more richly, as it was the more abundantly watered by the blood of martyrs. To these, as they died for the truth of the faith in countless numbers throughout all lands, even the persecuting kingdoms themselves yielded and were converted to the knowledge and worship of Christ, after the neck of their pride had been broken. Yet it was fitting that this vine should be pruned, as had repeatedly been foretold by the Lord, and that from it should be lopped the unfruitful branches, by which, under the name of Christ, heresies and schisms were occasioned in various places, on the part of those who sought not his glory but their own, and by whose opposition the Church was more and more exercised and her teaching and long-suffering both proven and illustrated.

Augustine refers to at least two of the allegorical battles depicted by Prudentius in the *Psychomachia*: the battles against Pride (*Superbia*) and against Long-Suffering (*Patientia*). The vine again symbolises the gospel, the unfruitful twigs, on the other hand, represent heretical literature and traditions. In the next chapter we will see in detail the propensity for early Christian apologists to regard various philosophical traditions, particularly materialist philosophies, as the origin of Christian non-conformism. Such an understanding may have informed Prudentius' rhetoric, because it is clear in Augustine that the unfruitful branches in question had inspired heretical discourse.

This section has shown that late antique Christian authors developed a number of strategies to blame disagreeing theological opinions on the philosophical opinions of the past and that these philosophical traditions therefore threatened the unity of the church. Their polemical discourse reveals a sense of danger deriving from philosophical counter-arguments against Christianity. While this does not mean that clerics resorted to book-burning to get rid of these traditions, it does show that books containing these traditions were frowned upon by clerics and ascetics. In the following sections I shall argue that it was these Christians groups that took advantage of the censorship legislation in Late Antiquity, with or without the help of Roman authorities.

venerandum fracta superbiae cervice conversa sunt. oportebat autem, ut eadem vitis, sicut a domino idemtidem praedictum erat, putaretur et ex ea praeciderentur infructuosa sarmenta, quibus haereses et schismata per loca facta sunt, sub Christi nomine, non ipsius gloriam, sed suam quaerentium per quorum adversitates magis magisque exerceretur ecclesia et probaretur atque illustraretur et doctrina eius et patientia. On the context, Aug. *catech. rud.* 8.12 (written between 399 and 405). It is not firmly known whether Prudentius was acquainted with Augustine or vice versa. Their common source could have been Iren. *haer.* 5.28.4.

3.4 Zacharias' Life of Severus

In the accounts of their lives there is evidence that holy men sometimes destroyed books. Perhaps no other source genre allows a greater insight into the reported daily lives of ordinary individuals and the cultural and religious power of the depicted holy men.⁴⁸ Written by contemporaries, eye-witnesses, and the students of the sainted person, the Lives of Saints do contain fictitious elements. Yet these accounts must have had a great impact on the relatively large audience of contemporaries they were disseminated among. These accounts were meant to demonstrate the power of holy men as well as to encourage admiration and imitation of their deeds. As such, they have significant worth as documents of cultural-historical dialogue in the context of this study. I shall analyse the hagiographical sources under the question of what genres of books were vulnerable to destruction, arguing that there was a grey area of books that were banned or destroyed and that this confirms the polemical discourse that I have just discussed.

The *Life of Severus* is often taken by scholars as a source to reconstruct the daily life relations between Christians and pagans. Its author, Zacharias Scholasticus (*465/6, d. after 536), studied literature and jurisprudence in Gaza, Alexandria and Beirut (Berytus) before he became bishop of Mytilene (on the island of Lesbos). Originally written in Greek but preserved in Syriac, his biography of Severus, Monophysite patriarch of Antioch, is an important source for Christian book-burning in the late fifth century. Trombley argued that Zacharias' account is largely reliable as a historical source because it was written by a highly educated eyewitness of the events.⁴⁹ However, more recent scholarship often qualifies the account as a tendentious and dishonest pamphlet, written to defend Severus from charges of paganism.⁵⁰ It is therefore likely that the text emphasises Severus' zeal to fight paganism and exaggerates charges against pagans.

Zacharias was a member of a Christian group called the *philóponoi*. These *philóponoi*, "friends of the suffering", were a semi-monastic institution that is attested in various cities of the East in the sixth and seventh centuries. Their aim was to cure the sick and to monitor and attack pagans. The *Life of Severus* is the most comprehensive source with which to reconstruct their activities.⁵¹ It illumi-

⁴⁸ Brown (1971); Magoulias (1967).

⁴⁹ See Trombley (1995), vol. 2:1.

⁵⁰ Watts (2005); Alan Cameron (2007), 23–8, who in particular discusses parallel evidence for the improbable episode of the Isis temple of Menouthis (see below).

⁵¹ They were also known as *spoudaíoi*. Another important source is Jo. Eph. *de beat. orient.* 45 (PO 18:669–76). See Magoulias (1964), 133–5. Watts (2005) with 440 note 10 (literature);

nates the atmosphere surrounding the pagan insurrection in the reign of the emperor Zeno that we have seen in section 2.6.⁵²

Before his conversion, Severus studied rhetoric in Alexandria. A connoisseur of Greek literature until peer pressure forced him to embrace Christianity, he ultimately rejected his previous investment in Greek mythologies.⁵³ Despite his thorough education, at the time of his conversion he lacked knowledge of even the most basic aspects of Christianity, so he asked Zacharias for copies of common Christian books such as those by Basil of Caesarea.⁵⁴ He was a student of the imperial law school, like co-students attracted to a monastic life, and he later became an intellectual leader of the Monophysite branch of Christianity. To facilitate the process of conversion, Zacharias had prepared a program specifically for the needs of intellectuals such as Severus. Law was to be studied in school each day of the week except Sundays, which were reserved for the study of canonical Christian authors. Such readings were strictly prescribed, usually beginning with various polemical treatises against pagans and ending with Basil's *Address to Young Men on the Right Use of Greek Literature*.⁵⁵ Basil's treatise allowed for a canon of morally inoffensive writings to be studied by Christians. The purpose of the educational program was quite clear: it was tailor-made to persuade well-educated people to abstain from reading more subversive pagan authors and ideally even from reading any pagan author at all following their conversion. It also shows that those that were involved in book-burning were trained in Christian polemical texts and had adopted their content.

The *Life of Severus* describes the *philóponoi* as a group whose provision of palliative care was coterminously linked to the practice of book-burning, notably in the cases of John Foulon from Thebes and two other pagan law students in Beirut. In this instance, the underlying assumption appears to have been that the demons in harmful books caused diseases. These law students had a reputation of being involved in magic. It was alleged that they were prepared to commit a human sacrifice in order to activate a love charm addressed to a woman living in chastity to whom John was attracted. For the purpose of pagan sacrifice, it

Wipszycka (1970), 520–22 gives a list of various literary and papyrological texts attesting this group.

⁵² On this connection, Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 37–8); Trombley (1995), vol. 2:20–29.

⁵³ This conversion story is narrated in a homily by Severus (*Laudatio S. Leontii* 4.1–6) that survives in a Coptic version, published with text and translation in Garitte (1966), quoted by Trombley (1995), vol. 2:49–50. This account matches the conversion account of the *Life of Severus* (93).

⁵⁴ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 48–9); Trombley (1995), vol. 2:30.

⁵⁵ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 52–4); Trombley (1995), vol. 2:32; Hall (2004), 200.

was suggested that they forced one of John's slaves to the hippodrome in the middle of the night.⁵⁶ The *philóponoi* decided to take action against John after the mistreated slave denounced John as having "books of magic" in his possession. It seems they accepted the case because of the book accusation rather than because of attempted murder, which was difficult to prove. The intention of committing a human sacrifice is not found in John's later confession, as reported by Zacharias, although the *philóponoi* pronounced that John was possessed by a demon that had been urging him to commit his crimes.

Accompanied by Polycarp, a soldier in the local bureau of the Praetorian Prefect, and Constantine, a lawyer, the *philóponoi* paid John a visit on the pretence of searching his house for incriminating books and ruling him out of their inquiries. John permitted the house-search, knowing that he had carefully hidden all of his suspicious books. When nothing was found following this search, the slave who had forwarded the initial accusation to the *philóponoi* indicated the hiding-place of the more problematic books.⁵⁷

As to the content of those magic books, Zacharias, who claims to have personally examined them, is more specific than elsewhere in his *Life of Severus*: "In these books were certain images of perverse demons, barbaric names and arrogant, harmful signs, full of pride and quite fit for perverse demons."⁵⁸ However, the books of John Foulon did not only contain magic spells because Zacharias mentions books authored by Zoroaster, Ostanes, and Manethon.⁵⁹ While the Persian Ostanes is counted among the successors of Zoroaster and among the authors of books on magic and alchemy, two different authors named Manethon are known to have composed historical works on Egypt in the Hellenistic age (extracts of which are found in Georgios Synkellos, a writer of the eighth century) and a hexametrical didactic poem on astrology of the second century AD respectively. It is likely that Zacharias would have been keen to name those authors that could most easily be linked to the unspecified field of magic in order to justify his actions.

John's reaction to the findings shows how the concept of forbidden books could be used as instrument of control in the later empire. He immediately confessed and begged the investigators not to hand him over for criminal prosecution, confirming that he was in fact a Christian and promising to abstain from any recourse to demons in the future. In exchange, he denounced the names

⁵⁶ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 58).

⁵⁷ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 59–61).

⁵⁸ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 62); Trombley (1995), vol. 2:36–7, compares this to the magical papyri.

⁵⁹ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 62).

of others as owners of similar books.⁶⁰ Also, he personally burnt all of his incriminating books in the fire that the investigators brought in. Following a long meeting during which his repentance was tested and established, the *philóponoi* made sure he was provided with Christian texts and he was charged to the care and supervision of clerics at the Church of St Jude, who were to see to it that he did not stray from the Christian way of life. The investigators prayed to God for the sake of his soul, which had just been rescued from the demons of his forbidden books.⁶¹

In addition to John's denunciation, a scribe had reported to Martyrius, church lector in Beirut, and to Polycarp, the aforementioned soldier, that one George of Thessalonike had commissioned him to copy "a book of magic."⁶² Trombley's assertion that Zacharias refers here to the transcription of a book from papyrus scroll to parchment codex could be correct.⁶³ Martyrius and Polycarp had in turn notified the *philóponoi*. The content of this book is not known, but the allegation that it was a magical text must be viewed as dubious as strictly magical literature was hardly ever written on parchment.⁶⁴ As George was probably aware of the potential danger involved in handing over such a book to a Christian scribe it is more likely that it was from a pagan genre that he would have had a realistic hope would be allowed rather than a magical one which he knew would be forbidden out of hand. That George was denounced in this fashion was not uncommon. Scribes were asked to report suspicious literature to Church authorities in order that they could censor the books in question. For example, in a similar case in Harran at the end of the sixth century a scribe denounced the local governor as a practitioner of "paganism", taking over the governor's position as a result.⁶⁵ This shows that it was difficult to copy problematic books and that denunciation could occur for personal reasons such as jealousy, anger or envy rather than because of religious purity or social control.

George had the additional problem of having been among the list of names divulged as keepers of forbidden books by John. His name was given alongside those of other law students, including Leontius. The latter was a teacher of law, although he had ceased to be at the time of composition.⁶⁶ The names were forwarded to another John, the local bishop, by the *philóponoi*. These persons also

⁶⁰ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 62).

⁶¹ See Trombley (1995), vol. 2:36–8.

⁶² Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 66).

⁶³ Trombley (1995), vol. 2:38.

⁶⁴ See Speyer (1992), 74–6.

⁶⁵ Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *Secular History* 5 (Palmer, 144).

⁶⁶ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 66).

had the reputation among the population of the entire city of keeping such books. Searches for these books were well organized, included both Church and state authorities and specifically targeted pagans. Their magic books were believed to have a harmful, contagious impact on the population because they contained demons:

The bishop assigned us to the members of the clergy and ordered us to examine the books of all those people. The public notaries (*demósioi*) were with us. The entire city was angry because they were often studying magic books instead of devoting themselves to law, and because the above-mentioned Leontius was harming them through his paganism. (Zach. v.Sev. 66)

The term *demósioi* (transcribed into the Syriac language) points to public slaves. Such public slaves were common in the cities of the Roman Empire from the late Republic onwards. Besides some religious duties, their various tasks included managing archives and guarding prisons.⁶⁷ Further on in the text, the *demósioi* are described as having been in charge of watching the bonfire prepared for burning the offending books. They were informed of the content of the books, although it does not seem that they personally inspected them.⁶⁸ Their duty here might have been simply to oversee the carrying out of the sentence at the end of the criminal procedure.

There follows a characterization of Leontius, in which charges related to magic, such as predicting future events (for example, predicting the gender of an unborn child), are linked to charges more broadly related to “paganism” and astrology, such as “aiding them to have access to idols”⁶⁹. The *philóponoi* then successfully searched houses for books and the “magic” books in the possession of George and one Asclepiodotus of Heliopolis-Baalbek were deposited in the centre of the city. Other alleged owners of such books, however, had fled and secreted their books. In addition, street-fighting occurred among the citizens after the pagan Chrysaorius of Tralles had called in a group of “trouble-makers” in order to halt the book-searches. Although the Christian Constantine of Beirut threatened to call in his band of rustics to fight back, the situation de-escalated when the *philóponoi* promised Leontius, not without hesitation on their part, that he could leave the city without harm.⁷⁰ He did so, speedily accepting baptism at the church consecrated to a martyr with the same name as his

⁶⁷ See Lenski (2006), 353–5; Weiss (2004).

⁶⁸ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 69).

⁶⁹ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 66–7).

⁷⁰ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 68).

own.⁷¹ Notably, Leontius was not among those reported to have been convicted of owning magic books so far and his case supports the view that the *philóponoi* argued it was in the interest of Christians to bring conversion rather than death to offenders. However, the evidence also shows that attempts to burn books were often resisted, indicating the value in which some owners held their texts.⁷²

For the book-burning itself, a bonfire was prepared in front of a church by the *philóponoi*. On order of the bishop, the *defensor* of the city, the *demósioi*, and members of the clergy gathered to watch the scene. We have seen in section 2.2 that the *defensores* were legally acting as a religious police force. No titles are given in the narrative, but the books are described as having contained the following: “fanfaronade of writings, atheistic and barbaric arrogance of demons, evil statements full of hatred for human kind as well as the arrogance of the devil, who teaches to promise and to perform horrible things of this kind”⁷³. Such descriptions echo the assertions made against the books in John Foulon’s possession. In addition to denouncing the texts, statements were read aloud to the effect that “the entire population yelled various shouts against the pagans and the magicians, extolled and praised to the skies those who had seen to it that these writings were divulged and cast into the fire.”⁷⁴ The reading aloud of the books destined for burning thus justified the deed. The whole process enacted a ritual of triumph intended to inflict fear on the population and incite them against people who continued to practise magic. As such, it is probable that the reader may have decided to read aloud only those statements which insinuated the crime associated with magic books. According to the public reading, the books included advice on how to cause civil riot, how to force a woman to have intercourse against her will, and how to commit and to conceal adultery and murder. This suggests that the books again seem to be full texts rather than just magic spells. We will see in section 3.6 that similar charges are found in legendary conversion accounts of magician-philosophers who burn their books. Even in rhetoric-schools in the West topics of an unrealistic, extremely violent nature were popular at the end of the first century.⁷⁵ At any rate although Christians could also occasionally be charged with having recourse

⁷¹ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 73).

⁷² Contra Trombley (1995), vol. 2:41: “The aim of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities in Berytus was eradicating the dangers thought to be posed by sorcery rather than imposing religious conformity.”

⁷³ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 69).

⁷⁴ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 70).

⁷⁵ Petron. 1.1–3; Tac. *dial.* 29.3–4; 35.4–5.

to magic, the magic books here in this late fifth-century text came to be associated only with pagans.

The fate of the books owned by the pagan Chrysaorius of Tralles indicates that the *Life of Severus* made no difference between pagan and magic books. Chrysaorius was forced to flee the city because he was accused of assisting a number of “magicians” from Iran in stealing church property. He took it as proof of his religion’s superiority that his “books of magic” had not been burnt despite the allegations against him:⁷⁶

After he decided to return to his homeland, he hired a ship onto which he loaded all the magic books he had reportedly acquired at a considerable cost in gold, according to well-informed individuals. He also embarked the law books and most of the silver objects he owned, as well as his children and their mother, who was his concubine. He ordered to set sail at the moment he and many other persons thought favourable, after he had consulted some treatise on magic, the movement of the stars, and made his own calculations. He himself had to return to his homeland by the overland route. The ship sailed with the promise of the demons and astrologers that it would be saved with all that it contained. Yet in spite of the magic and magic books, the ship was destroyed, and nothing that Chrysaorius had embarked was saved.

Such stories of sinking ships, as a sign of divine punishment, are a common literary topos in the hagiographical genre.⁷⁷ The destruction of books demonstrated that the demons contained in these books had been overcome. The passage explicates the range of “magic” books. The *Life of Severus* divides books into magic books, books of law, and Christian books. Anything which did not fall among the latter two categories seems to have been classified as magic books by the author of this *Life*. For example, the apparently rational (albeit in this case useless) nautical calculations made by Chrysaorius are attributed exclusively to the realm of magic. As the text implies, such books must have been expensive to acquire. Their content is opposed only to that found in books of law. As a wealthy and learned pagan who owned valuable books, it is likely that Chrysaorius intended to rescue all his books from the Christian mob and the local authorities.

Hall correctly notes that a comparison of three stories from the *Life of Severus* indicates that the text applied the categories of magical and pagan indiscriminately to people.⁷⁸ The narrative seems to have applied both categories to books

⁷⁶ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 74). The context for this episode begins in Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 71).

⁷⁷ See V. Nicol. *Sion*. 28–30 with the commentary of Blum (1997), 106.

⁷⁸ Hall (2004), 164, referring to Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 75).

similarly without discrimination. This seems to be the case in the tendentious conversion story of Paralius of Aphrodisias, in which Zacharias attempts to debunk the efficiency of pagan miracles. Paralius studied under the grammarian Horapollon, who was “full of admiration for demons and magic.”⁷⁹ Paralius was alienated from his circle after a visit to his brother Athanasius at the Enaton monastery. Paralius allegedly came to consider Christian miracles as superior to pagan ones after he had found out that the incubation rites practiced at the Isis temple of Menouthis (close to Canopus) – which involved intercourse with a stone representation of Isis – had failed in the case of the pagan philosopher Asclepiodotus and his infertile wife. The couple instead was advised to adopt one of the priestess' children. Paralius was physically attacked for doubting the efficacy of the ritual and for assuming that the priestess was a temple prostitute. In retaliation the *philoponoí* incited the Christian population to march against the temple of Isis and to burn its idols, as well as those in public baths and private houses. These Christians were aided by the authorities, notably by the *defensor*, who was in charge of conducting religious trials in the city.⁸⁰ We have seen that the *Codex Theodosianus* put *defensores* in charge of following up private accusations related to religious infractions, including book crimes. This highlights the way how Roman authorities collaborated with local Christian groups.

Before receiving baptism, Paralius burnt the invocation formulae to the gods in his possession, books which the following clause significantly counts as “idols.”⁸¹ This indicates that destruction of cult statues (iconoclasm) sometimes involved the destruction of books without the latter category being explicitly or distinctly recorded. Paralius, however, continued to be troubled by demons and asked Zacharias for help in this matter:⁸²

I walked over, having with me a Christian book, and I wanted to read a treatise to him, Gregory the Theologian's homily of exhortation on redemptive baptism. I found him wet with perspiration and quite discouraged after his battle with the demons. He said that

⁷⁹ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 15). Watts (2005) argued that the *Life of Paralius* was a short polemical piece, of questionable *Quellenwert*, originally written in the 490s, and included in the *Life of Severus* in the 510s or 520s.

⁸⁰ On the defensor, Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 36). An extensive summary for the whole story in Trombley (1995), vol. 2:4 – 15.

⁸¹ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 37): “He [Paralius] received baptism after he had first burnt the invocation formulae to the gods of the pagans, that is to the demons, that he owned. For these had harassed him before divine baptism and still filled him with horror during the night after the idols had been burnt.”

⁸² Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 37 – 8); cf. Speyer (1981), 170.

he could hardly breathe under the influence of the Christian text. I asked him if he might still have any invocation formulas to the pagan gods. After he had searched his memory, he confessed that he owned papyri (*chártes*) of that type. Then he listened to me as I said: 'If you wish to be delivered from the obsession of the demons, throw these papyri into the flames!' He did this in my presence, and was immediately delivered from the obsession of the demons.

Although the text gives no specific titles, Trombley has noted that by this point the "papyri of that type" can no longer be identified simply with magic books or pagan prayers. Instead, Trombley argues that these burnt papyri might have contained Atticist prayers such as the hymns written by Proclus.⁸³ The book that Paralius allegedly burnt in order to signal and complete his conversion was probably not strictly a magical one. Perhaps the papyri contained poetry that included invocation formulae. At any rate, this passage clearly shows that books were burnt in order to destroy the demons contained in these books and thus to relieve their owner from the diseases that were caused by these demons.

After he had listened to a passage in Gregory of Nazianzus concerning advice to shun all things mundane, Paralius responded that he should from now on embrace divine philosophy. Shortly after, Paralius wrote to his pagan brothers, admonishing them also to follow the one God. Perhaps it again was the *philóponoi* who had urged Paralius to denounce others. This shows that denunciation could be an effective way to prosecute book-offences.

The *Life of Severus* illuminates the practice of book-burning, as it does mention Church and state institutions as well as their acting as a religious police force. These institutions are relatively well attested in other sources. As this section has indicated, monastic, semi-monastic and clerical institutions, appealing to the help of state authorities, initiated house-searches to identify and destroy forbidden books, and these books did not only contain magic spells, but also literary texts associated with magic. We will also see in the following section that clerics and ascetics burnt books more often than the state authorities did.

3.5 "I Give You Power to Trample on Serpents"

Hagiographical texts tend to emphasise the voluntariness of book-burning. But the line between persuasion and coercion was often elusive. This section will show that there is evidence to suggest that the clergy rather than the Roman authorities were sometimes proactive in enforcing book-burning laws.

⁸³ Trombley (1995), vol. 2:16 with note 76.

Hypatius was abbot of a monastery near Chalcedon in Bithynia in the first half of the fifth century. His life is recounted by his student Callinicus, another eye-witness. While performing divine services along with his brethren Hypatius noticed that one man smelled like the devil. Although this man is often held to be a sorcerer, there is no clear evidence in Callinicus’ text this was the case. Forced to give answers as to his origin and social position, the man replied against his will that he came from Antioch and had the intention of becoming a Christian. After he had been searched, the man’s Artemis-belt was burnt. As the belt failed to ignite, Hypatius personally trampled on it, tearing it into little pieces and mixing it up with dirt before throwing it into the latrines.⁸⁴ Hypatius further demanded: “If you want to become a Christian, bring me the papyrus-scroll of yours and all your curious things”⁸⁵. The term “curious things” (*perierga*) is the same as the one found in the Acts to describe the content of books that were burnt in Ephesus. To ensure that he would comply the anonymous man was taken in custody by one of Hypatius’ brethren but managed to escape forced conversion and the destruction of his book. While much of the hagiographical discourse on book-burning seems to be based on literary topoi, I would agree with Trombley that conversion often involved the destruction of written material which was obviously not in accordance with Christian faith.⁸⁶

Zealous Christians, often supported by authorities, sometimes burnt books as part of a violent spectacle. They burnt books along with other religious objects, primarily cult statues. In 402, Gaza’s most famous temple, the Marneion, where Zeus Marnas was worshipped, was destroyed along with other temples and burnt to the ground. In the wake of this religious struggle, houses were searched, just like in Antioch, in order to find both cult statues and books:⁸⁷

After this, houses were also searched. For there were many statues in most courts, and from those that were found, a part was thrown in the fire, another part cast in sewers. They also found books filled with magic, which they call holy and from which they perform rites and other unlawful things; they tolerate that these things are equal to their gods.

⁸⁴ A similar scene in poetry is the destruction of Heresy in Prudentius, p. 90 above.

⁸⁵ Call. *v.Hyp.* 43.8: εἰ βούλει χριστιανὸς γενέσθαι, φέρε μοι τὸ βιβλίον σου καὶ πάντα τὰ περί-εργά σου.

⁸⁶ Trombley (1995), vol. 2:17.

⁸⁷ Marc. Diac. *v.Porph.* 71: μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα καὶ τῶν οἰκιῶν ἐγένετο ἔρευνα. πολλὰ γὰρ ὑπῆρχεν εἰδωλα ἐν πλείσταις αὐλαῖς, καὶ τὰ εὕρισκόμενα τὰ μὲν πυρὶ παρεδίδοντο, τὰ δὲ εἰς βόρβορον ἐρρίπτοντο. εὕρισκοντο δὲ καὶ βιβλία πεπληρωμένα γοητείας, ἅτινα ἱερὰ αὐτοὶ ἔλεγον, ἐξ ὧν τὰς τελετὰς καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἀθέμιτα ἐποιοῦν οἱ τῆς εἰδωλομανίας, καὶ αὐτὰ δὲ ὁμοίως ἴσα τοῖς θεοῖς αὐτῶν ἔπασχον.

Sarefield here thinks that the books presumably burnt in the *Life of Porphyry* included not only magical but also other pagan books.⁸⁸ The author of the life clearly thought of pagan religious texts (ritual books) as magic books. The description of their houses indicates that these pagans were rich. The general historical value of this hagiographical source, however, has frequently been questioned. Rapp largely follows MacMullen in questioning the face value of the source and even the existence of its protagonist, but both scholars regard many of the historical details as trustworthy. In this case doubts appear to have risen due to the different redactions of the extant text. The Greek and Georgian versions were developed from a common Syriac source, perhaps in the sixth century. In this process, the original text was probably reworded.⁸⁹ But the text must have appeared realistic to contemporary readers and therefore allows us to learn about “the general ways things happened.”⁹⁰ Based on an extensive discussion of its historical accuracy, Barnes recently suggested that the text is a forgery from no earlier than the sixth century and probably from the age of Justinian, although perhaps based on a fifth-century source.⁹¹ Narratives of book-destruction appear with relative frequency in hagiographical texts from the age of Justinian.

It has been assumed that John Chrysostom, at that time bishop of Constantinople, was responsible for ordering the temples of Gaza to be destroyed.⁹² To be sure, John’s career at that time was in shambles, but still it is reasonable to think he played some role in the events – if the *Life of Porphyry* is reliable here. John’s polemics, as we will see, represented the extremist position that Christians should ideally not read anything pagan and he often condemns ancient philosophy. He equates some philosophical schools with magic. If the historical discourse of the *Life of Porphyry* is correct here, then it was mostly the angry Christian population that was involved in these house-searches, helped by the soldiery.⁹³ They may not have taken the time or have lacked the literary skill to make a thorough decision between suspicious books. This incident again shows that zealous Christians collaborated with Roman authorities in burning books.

⁸⁸ Cf. Sarefield (2004), 86; also discussed by Trombley (1995), vol. 1:218; Speyer (1981), 136. And see Dickie (2001), 314–19 on the grey area between magic and learned scholarship in Late Antiquity.

⁸⁹ Greek Text: Grégoire and Kugener (1930); Georgian version: Peeters (1941).

⁹⁰ MacMullen (1984), 87; similarly, Rapp (2001), 55–6.

⁹¹ Barnes (2010), 260–83.

⁹² Kelly (1995), 142.

⁹³ Marc. Diac. *v.Porphyr.* 69–70.

The practice of searching private dwellings for prohibited or questionable texts is a recurrent theme in hagiographical texts. For example, Shenoute of Egypt, abbot of the White monastery (near Souhag), was the leader of a group of monks intending to wipe out the visible remainders of paganism. In the fragments of his works (as far as they are published), the destruction of cult statues and sanctuaries in upper Egypt went hand in hand with the destruction of pagan books on two occasions. It is pertinent that according to one source this violence was directed against a "book full of all magical arts" which could have been among the other objects of value that were brought to the White monastery.⁹⁴ According to another source, related to a different event, Shenoute had pagan books destroyed but there is no hint these contained magic. Instead, it suggests that, with regard to the pagan Gesius of Paphos, "we have taken away all books from the house of this impious person."⁹⁵ Two more sources allude to this house search and the subsequent act of destruction without mentioning explicitly that books were destroyed.⁹⁶ This could indicate that book-destruction was less likely to enter the historical record than other acts of cultural vandalism performed by zealous Christians. Alan Cameron proposed that the owners of these houses were Greek-speaking members of the elite who were educated in the classics and lovers of classicizing art.⁹⁷ The implication is that there was an underlying social conflict. While this is certainly true, it can also be argued that Shenoute was primarily interested in the eradication of pagan philosophy. He composed polemical invectives against pagans, particularly philosophers. To him, the charges of paganism and heresy were closely associated to each other.⁹⁸ He surely had no intention to stamp out classical culture (although it is possible that a few classical texts were burnt during this process), but it is likely that philosophical treatises disagreeing with the Christian world view would have ended on a bonfire if discovered during his searches.

⁹⁴ Leipoldt (1908), 26.150.15–16: πλωμε ετμελ μαγια ιμ; translated into Latin by Wiesmann (1953), no. 26.26–7: *volumine omnium artium magicarum pleno*. Emmel (2004), 14.2.2 (p. 681 = Table 133, p. 866) dated it between 412 and 444, probably after Cyril's triumph in Ephesus in 431.

⁹⁵ Leipoldt (1908), 13.32.1–3: αγω ιτοχ χρηςιπος νεφριτολις τπανος ριιερσοο ιταιιχι ιιιλωμε τηρογ ρμπι μιιατηρογε. Wiesmann (1953), no. 13.32.21–2: *Et Chrysippus ille quidem in Panos urbe erat iis diebus, quibus ex domo istius impii omnia volumina abstulimus*.

⁹⁶ Leipoldt (1903), 180–81, note 6.

⁹⁷ Alan Cameron (2007), 39–41.

⁹⁸ See Leipoldt (1908), no. 18, 25; Emmel (2004), p. 641, 656, 683, 846. And see Hahn (2004), 263 with note 226.

Shenoute's monastery was built from temple spoils, including hieroglyphic inscriptions.⁹⁹ Winter notes that Shenoute described what these hieroglyphics look like, but showed no indication of being able to understand them except for their power to condemn souls.¹⁰⁰ Zacharias' *Life of Severus* reports that local Christians conducted a thorough search in a house in Canopus storing pagan inscriptions (which were probably hieroglyphic), noting that all demons and idols were removed for destruction.¹⁰¹ To celebrate their destruction, these zealous Christians quoted a line from the Gospel of Luke: "And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, 'Sir, even the devils are subject to us through thy name;' and he [Jesus] said to them, 'I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give you power to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.'"¹⁰² Cyril of Alexandria uses the same rhetoric in a polemical digression against Greek philosophy and music.¹⁰³ Zacharias links the passage to the Christian parable of the harvest, which Prudentius also used as a picture for the dissemination of the gospel on the expense of other literature as we have seen in section 3.3. This polemical rhetoric shows that the destruction of writing was thought to destroy the demons contained in these writings and thus to combat their contagious pollution.

Holy men also eradicated pagan articles in rural areas. In sixth-century Lycia, a hagiographical life, probably written by a student of the saint, narrates the deeds of Nicholas of Sion (not to be confused with the bishop Nicholas of Myra, legendary model for Santa Claus). Blum has convincingly argued that this hagiographical account, written in plain and simple Greek, is reliable in terms of demographic and institutional details.¹⁰⁴ Much of Nicholas' celebrity in the area was based on his miraculous fight against an evil tree. People from the small town of Plakoma came to Nicholas to seek his help against this evil tree, possessed by a demon and polluting both human beings and crops. Nicholas promised to investigate the matter and, upon closer examination, found that there were certain marks on the tree. No one from the populace

⁹⁹ See Sauer (2003), 102.

¹⁰⁰ Winter (1991), 101, referring to Young (1981).

¹⁰¹ Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 27–30).

¹⁰² Zach. v.Sev. (Kugener, 30), based on Luke 10:17–19: ὑπέστρεψαν δὲ οἱ ἐβδομήκοντα [δύο] μετὰ χαρᾶς λέγοντες· κύριε, καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια ὑποτάσσεται ἡμῖν ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου. εἶπεν δὲ αὐτοῖς· ἐθεώρουν τὸν Σατανᾶν ὡς ἄστραπην ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πεσόντα. ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ὑμῖν τὴν ἐξουσίαν τοῦ πατεῖν ἐπάνω ὄφρων καὶ σκορπίων, καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ ἐχθροῦ, καὶ οὐδὲν ὑμᾶς οὐ μὴ ἀδικήσῃ.

¹⁰³ Cyr. *hom. pasch.* 4.3 (PG 77:460B). Both probably borrowed from Ath. v.Anton. 30.

¹⁰⁴ Blum (1997), 12–17.

– a total of 300 had arrived excited to watch Nicholas’ deeds against the tree – was able to provide a reasonable explanation other than that “a long time ago” a man had tried to cut down the tree but was slain by the demon. After three hours of prayer, Nicholas finally came to the resolution that it was necessary to cut down the tree. It is counted among the greatest miracles of Nicholas that he was able to get hold of enough woodcutters to saw the tree up into little pieces and ensure that the demon was overcome.¹⁰⁵ Such cutting down of evil trees is amply attested for as a practice in both parts of the former empire.¹⁰⁶ The episode illustrates the thoroughness with which pagan remains were done away with in sixth-century rural areas. Moreover, I suggest that the marks described in this tree may have been letters. It is likely given the location and the cultural-historical context that the tree was dedicated to some tutelage spirit whose name may have been engraved in the tree. This conclusion can be arrived at because if the marks were merely a symbol, the rustics would more easily have identified its meaning. Excepting the clergy, the rustics are described as involved in manufacturing and there is no indication that they were literate. While I have argued in this section that in hagiographical sources there is a clear overlap between magical books and pagan books in general, this passage again shows that people thought that the demons were contagious and the cause of all sorts of diseases. We will see this justification again in the next section.

3.6 Individuals Renouncing their Past

Having discussed the reported cases of zealous Christians deliberately burning books to create a spectacle and to ward off demons, I will now survey the incidents of voluntary book-burning attested in Christian literature in order to argue that in the Christian imagination magic books were often placed on a par with or considered identical to philosophical books in these contexts. Obviously, these incidents are very different from those that I have discussed so far. There is no government or any other agency involved in any individual decision to burn books that are privately owned. These incidents need therefore to be understood as purification rituals rather than as acts of censorship. The owners usually burnt books to demonstrate that they had renounced their past. As I have already established, burning magical books had powerful political, social and re-

105 *V. Nicol. Sion* 15 ff. The tree may be attributed, not without doubt, to a cypress pictured on a coin from third-century Myra. See Blum’s (1997) commentary, ad locum, p. 102.

106 See Trombley (1985), 333–4; Blum (1997), 102 on testimonials. Another testimonial is *Prud. c.Symm.* 2.1010–11.

ligious connotations and the act itself could take on the performative aspects of a ritual. On the other hand, in most cases there was some kind of external persuasion involved.

There are conversion stories where magicians are reported to have burnt books either voluntarily or under the encouragement or direction of a saint. Their efficacy as an example relied on their depiction of the magician themselves becoming a saint, something designed to compel other sinners to recant and repent. As is the case in narratives of this type, there is a thematic and stylistic consistency which means that they can be considered to depend and build on each other and therefore make use of literary topoi. However, these recurrent themes and tropes arose from real life applications and examples. The questions this section will investigate are, then, what genres of books, if any, are mentioned as books owned by magicians and what proven cases are known where converts actually burnt their books?

The Acts of Lucianus and Marcianus could be the first example (after the Acts of the Apostles) of both this symbolic appropriation and the conversion stories that came to be associated with the narrative of book-burning. According to these Martyr Acts demons summoned by the two fail to trick a Christian virgin into intercourse. Because of its failure, Lucianus and Marcianus disavow their magical art and publicly burn their books (*codices suos*).¹⁰⁷ They went on to allegedly suffer martyrdom, being burnt alive in the age of Decius (249–251). These Martyr Acts link magical, demonical art to pagan identity (*errore gentilitatis*).¹⁰⁸ The publicity of the event is a decisive factor both here and in cases of coerced book-burning. This text again shows the link between the burning of books and the burning of bodies. Both events ensured that these individuals had vanquished their demons and were granted a status of holiness.

Similar themes emerge in the much more popular conversion narrative of Cyprian of Antioch. In his autobiographical *Confessio seu paenitentia Cypriani*,¹⁰⁹ Cyprian refers to himself as a “magician-philosopher.”¹¹⁰ He had been a member of several ancient cults and was initiated in the mysteries of Mithras and of

107 *Acta Luciani et Marciani* 3 (*ActaSS Oct.* 11:817).

108 *Acta Luciani et Marciani* 1, 9 (*ActaSS Oct.* 11:817–18).

109 German translation in Zahn (1882). Zahn identified this text as a source for the German Faust legend, in which a scholar is thirsty for knowledge, bequeathing his soul to the devil. This was famously adopted by Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Radermacher (1927) edited similar legendary texts which include the bishop destroying *Teufelspakte*. (*Narratio Helladii*, p. 146; *Narratio Theophili*, p. 176, 216–17), see Speyer (1981), 171, note 13.

110 *Confessio seu paenitentia* 9 (*ActaSS Sept.* 7:228 = 8 Zahn, 40): μάγος φιλόσοφος.

Demeter.¹¹¹ Well-travelled and educated, including in Greek philosophy, and having written many books,¹¹² it is likely that his knowledge had been acquired during his stay in Greece and Egypt.¹¹³ Following the usual narrative of Christian polemical writing (as we shall see in the next section), Cyprian links philosophy to demons, suggesting that they are outwardly decorated but lacking substance.¹¹⁴ As a “teacher of impiety”, he notes that he had many students, that he was also acquainted with astrological and astronomical studies and had associated with the devil.¹¹⁵ The narrative also positions Justina, a Christian virgin, as the cause of Cyprian’s conversion. Because his love spells fail to attract her to a suitor, Cyprian repents of his sins, including having previously burnt Christian scripture.¹¹⁶ Following this, the Christian presbyter Eusebius instructs Cyprian in Christian teachings, starting off with the conversion of Paul and the public burning of books in Ephesus. Having heard this, Cyprian decides to burn his “books of the devil” publicly too.¹¹⁷ Cyprian’s conversion from pagan to Christian was so successful, and complete, that he eventually became bishop and was recognized as a saint after his death.

Reitzenstein has shown that the legend of Cyprian is fictitious and was generated gradually over time.¹¹⁸ Krestan and Hermann have identified three early sources for the legend: *Conversio Iustinae et Cypriani*, from c. 350; *Confessio seu paenitentia Cypriani*, datable between 350 and 379; *Martyrium Cypriani et Iustinae*, datable after 379. Each of these is extant in various late antique translations probably from Greek originals, indicating the popularity of this subject.¹¹⁹ Empress Eudocia penned a poem relating to the legend in the fifth century. The *Confessio* shows some modifications compared to the other texts. In the earliest version (*Conversion*), Cyprian brings his books to the bishop and asks him to burn them after the demon told Cyprian he had been overcome by the sign of the cross. It suggests that after the books were burnt, Cyprian also demolished

111 *Confessio seu paenitentia* 1 (*ActaSS Sept.* 7:222 = Zahn, 31).

112 *Confessio seu paenitentia* 5 (*ActaSS Sept.* 7:224 = 3 Zahn, 36).

113 *Confessio seu paenitentia* 1–3 (*ActaSS Sept.* 7:222–3 = 1–2 Zahn, 31–4).

114 *Confessio seu paenitentia* 5 (*ActaSS Sept.* 7:224 = Zahn, 36).

115 *Confessio seu paenitentia* 18 (*ActaSS Sept.* 7:235 = 15 Zahn, 51): ἀσεβείας διδάσκαλος; *Confessio seu paenitentia* 5–7 (*ActaSS Sept.* 7:224–5 = 4–6 Zahn, 36–40).

116 *Confessio seu paenitentia* 16 (*ActaSS Sept.* 7:234 = 14 Zahn, 49): ἔκαυον, according to Zahn, p. 49, note 3.

117 *Confessio seu paenitentia* 23, 28 (*ActaSS Sept.* 7:239, 241 = 20, 24 Zahn, 56, 62).

118 Reitzenstein (1917).

119 See Krestan and Hermann (1957), 467–9.

the cult statues in his possession.¹²⁰ This shows that he destroyed the demons represented not only in material art work, but also in the books he owned. The story includes a mother–daughter conflict: Justina is disobedient as she rejects philosophy in favour of Christianity.¹²¹ According to the late fourth-century *Martyrium*, Cyprian suffered martyrdom during the reign of Diocletian.

The legend was interpreted differently over time. Gregory of Nazianzus refers to the books that Cyprian burnt as “magic books.”¹²² By contrast, the early fifth-century version of Prudentius, who perhaps deliberately confuses the legendary Cyprian with the famous Christian author Cyprian of Carthage, is slightly different.¹²³ Besides for magic, Cyprian had been known “for his skill in evil arts.” This wording comes close to Prudentius’ depreciation of the rhetorical tradition elsewhere.¹²⁴ In the *prooemium* to his versification of the material, Prudentius predicts that every Christian will be reading Cyprian’s Passion “as long as there shall be any book, any collections of sacred writings.”¹²⁵ I would argue that the line needs to be read as a warning against subversive pagan books as the poet seems to be thinking of books as an endangered species limited largely to Christian content.

The apocryphal Latin *Passion of the Apostle James*, written probably in the late sixth century, also explains book-burning as a consequence of repentance and the vanquishing of demons. By throwing them into water rather than into fire, one Hermogenes, an enemy of James, destroys such a number of books that his students needed to help him carrying entire book chests. James’ Passion also mentions magic books (*collectis libris magicis*¹²⁶), calls Hermogenes a magician (*magus*),¹²⁷ and narrates that Hermogenes acts like a philosopher who involves the apostle James into a Christological controversy.¹²⁸ In the text, to avoid being troubled by demons in the future Hermogenes promises to abstain from reading an unspecified range of books: “I shall throw away all my

120 *Conversio Iustinae et Cypriani* 10, Zahn, p. 27–8 (German), 150–51 (Greek). And see Radermacher (1927), 104–7.

121 *Conversio Iustinae et Cypriani* 1, Zahn, p. 22 (German), 140–41 (Greek).

122 Gr. Naz. or. 24.12 (PG 35:1184A): γοητικὰς βιβλους.

123 Prud. *perist.* 13.1–4.

124 Prud. *perist.* 13.21–3, at 21: *doctissimus artibus sinistris*, cf. 2, 10–11, 31 on rhetoric.

125 Prud. *perist.* 13.7–8: *dum liber ullus erit, dum scrinia sacra litterarum, | te leget omnīs amans Christum, tua, Cypriane, discet.*

126 Ps.-Abdias 4.4 (Fabricius, *Codex apocryphus* 2:1719, 520).

127 Ps.-Abdias 4.3 (Fabricius, 518).

128 Ps.-Abdias 4.2 (Fabricius, 517).

books, in which there were forbidden, presumptuous things, and I shall renounce all the arts of the enemy.” As with other conversion stories, Hermogenes is advised to destroy his books along with cult statues and divination formulas and henceforward to encourage his former auditors to convert as well (and thus to destroy their books).¹²⁹ The text therefore develops and echoes the themes shown in Cyprian’s story.

Summarising these aspects, it is clear that the destruction of books and of cult statues served similar purposes. If individuals burnt their books, they got rid of the demons that had previously assisted them. They were henceforward aided only by God. The theoretical underpinning of this view is found in Augustine’s *City of God*. According to this work devils or demons are spiritual beings which float around in the air and thereby contaminate human beings.¹³⁰ Demoniac books can therefore be contagious. Because Augustine had probably read the Latin poet Lucretius, he may well have borrowed this contagion theory from the Epicurean theory that diseases, such as the plague, are caused by “seeds” (*semina*), which are floating in the air and often produced in tropical regions.¹³¹ Moreover, Augustine suggests that fire has the ability to burn not only human bodies, but also the aerial demons.¹³² This means that individuals were able to destroy the demons that possessed them and therefore to avoid hellfire. Among monastic-ascetic communities, book-burning was thought to be salutary for the greater community because demons were contagious and keen to drag people into hell.

The Greek *Life of Barlaam and Ioasaph*, which appropriated some elements of the Buddha-story, links “magic books”¹³³ more clearly to pagan books than earlier conversion accounts. It has been thought that this legendary Life was written during the Iconoclastic Controversy of the eighth century as it echoes the polemical positions popular during this age. However, it is now thought to be from the tenth century.¹³⁴ In it, the saint Ioasaph gives an interesting speech in which he explicates the “books of superstition”¹³⁵ as being of poetical content, narrating about child abuse, a common polemical stereotype for the pagan poetical genre.¹³⁶ At the same time, Theudas, a pagan who burns his books, is

¹²⁹ Ps.-Abdias 4.4 (Fabricius, 520): *ut omnes codices meos, in quibus erat illicita praesumptio, abjecerim, et omnibus simul artibus renunciaverim inimici*. Another conversion story that includes the burning of magic books in sixth-century Galatia is *Vita Theodori* 38.

¹³⁰ Aug. civ. 9.18.

¹³¹ Lucr. 6.1090 ff.

¹³² Aug. civ. 21.10.

¹³³ Ps.-Jo.D. *Vita Barlaam et Ioas.* 32.302 (Woodward and Mattingly, 504): μαγικάς βίβλους.

¹³⁴ See Volk (2009), who also edited a new critical edition (2006).

¹³⁵ Ps.-Jo.D. *Vita Barlaam et Ioas.* 286 (W./M., 478–80): συντάγμασι τῆς δεισιδαμονίας.

¹³⁶ Ps.-Jo.D. *Vita Barlaam et Ioas.* 297 (W./M., 496). Cf. Prud. *perist.* 10.196–200.

aligned with the “Chaldean race”, magic, Babylon and the art of philosophers and orators, who are “puffed up with pride.”¹³⁷ In its echo of themes and tropes common to the genre, therefore, it can be supposed that this *Life* is building on a long tradition of literary topoi. It is therefore worth having a look at non-legendary conversion accounts.

Is there evidence outside the hagiographical genre that magician-philosophers converted, burnt their books and became important clerics or even saints? In section 3.4, we have already seen that in the narrative of the *Life of Severus* Paralius was advised to burn any papyri containing invocations in his possession. Moreover, in the context of his sermon in which he says that a *mathematicus* was about to burn his books (section 2.3, above), Augustine calls attention to the fear of the congregation that the convert may wish to hold a clerical position henceforward. In line with the first examples we have discussed, this suggests that it must have been common for pagans educated in this art to be promoted to Church offices after conversion.¹³⁸ Augustine himself is perhaps the best example because he was a Manichaean before he became a bishop. In his letter to Dioscorus, he compares his previous teaching experience to selling childish things to children, words echoed by John Chrysostom with regard to philosophers and orators which we have already seen.¹³⁹

In his sermon Augustine goes on to say that although a Christian, this person needed to burn his books to demonstrate his successful conversion: “He brought in his books in order to burn these, on grounds of which he himself was to be burnt” (in hell).¹⁴⁰ This shows that he burnt his books in order to avoid the purgatory effects of hellfire. In this case, Augustine also organizes a narrative that tells of a *mathematicus* who burns his books in the hope of rising through the clerical ranks and is afterwards to be monitored as to his reading interests. Caseau is therefore right to argue that opportune conversions among members of the elite aroused suspicion and it was therefore in the best interest of the convert to show that he now was a genuine Christian.¹⁴¹ As well as stating their conversion, burning suspicious books could have emphasized their commitment. This

137 Ps.-Jo.D. *Vita Barlaam et Ioas*. 286: γένους Χαλδαϊκοῦ, 299, 285, 294, 297, 298: πλήρεις ἀλαζονείας ὄντες (W./M., 480, 500, 478, 492, 496, 498).

138 Also Aug. *ep.* 137.4.16 says that nowadays many learned persons have come to submit their knowledge to the dissemination of faith.

139 Aug. *ep.* 118.2.9.

140 Aug. *enarr. in. psalm.* 61.23 (CCSL 39:793): *portat se cum codices incendendos, per quos fuerat incendendus*.

141 Caseau (2007).

is supported by other reported cases where converts renounced their past by rejecting the books associated with their prior allegiances. At the beginning of the third century, the important Christian author Origen is said to have “disposed of whatever valuable books of ancient literature he possessed” – not only to get rid of what distracts from studying Christian scriptures, but also to make an ascetic living from the sale.¹⁴² We have seen that Arnobius in his polemical work called for the burning of pagan books allegedly to show the bishop that his conversion was genuine.

A similar case from the mid-fourth century is that of Firmicus Maternus who first authored an astrological poem and after conversion wrote a piece of Latin Christian polemics, advocating the violent suppression of any form of deviance (*De errore profanarum religionum*). While he is respectful towards the philosopher Porphyry in his early work (7.1.1), Firmicus derides him in the latter (13.4–5). Ammianus too reports of the *mathematicus* Heliodorus, who became instrumental in prosecuting the magic trials under Valens, during which we have seen many books were burnt.¹⁴³ These examples suggest that people could turn from paganism but yet then carry out verbal and actual persecutions of pagans. A less radical but similar attitude emerges in fifth-century Gaul. At a point when Christianity was firmly established, Sidonius Apollinaris, who had incorporated mythological elements in his early poems (10–11), completely changed his tone after he became bishop in 469.

It is evident that burning at least the more problematic books in one’s possession (such as astrological poems) was helpful for a clerical career and to facilitate posthumous recognition as a saint but a demonstrable change of attitude helped and this can be no more clearly shown than being firmly against all of the elements that many of these individuals had previously embraced as life tenets. Conversion was possible at any stage of their life. It is interesting in this context that in these conversion accounts, the magicians who burn their books are often equated with philosophers before their conversion. This emphasizes the reward strategies that appear in the legendary conversion stories – both as actual events and as part of their morally didactic message. While the book-burning is depicted as a voluntary act, that coercion existed on legislative, one-to-one, and reward levels should not be doubted.

In the next section I shall argue that a grey area existed between philosophy and magic as much as between philosophy and heresy. I shall continue to discuss this also in the following chapter with special emphasis on materialist phi-

¹⁴² Eus. *h.e.* 6.3.8–9.

¹⁴³ Amm. 29.1.5; 29.2.6–7.

losophies. I would argue that Christian polemical texts doubted the worthiness of certain philosophical ideas and that these texts were appealing to clerics and ascetics. In this context, book-burning was a powerful tool to demonstrate the demonic content of books. The following section continues to discuss the metaphorical language that Christian intellectuals deployed to describe what books meant and what their power was in this period of time.

3.7 Philosophy and Magic

We have seen how and why magic books were occasionally destroyed by state authorities, monks and holy men throughout Late Antiquity. One of the most important factors in this process was the progressive banning of magic books by imperial law. It is therefore pertinent that some Christian authors, such as John Chrysostom, tended to equate magical and heretical literature with certain strands of ancient philosophy in their polemical attacks. While this rhetoric is not without precedent in pagan texts, this investigation supports the academic position that notes the contiguity of the language of this imperial legislation to that of important Christian authors, explaining why magical literature was sometimes linked to forbidden investigations into nature in legal language. This investigation also advances the proposition that the philosophical traditions that were linked to magic and heresy were deliberately left unpreserved and that in many Christian communities a refusal to copy them arose. Unless the attitudes of authors like John Chrysostom in this regard were not shared by most other Christians, particularly in monastic institutions that came to be the preservers of ancient literature, this would appear to be an unavoidable conclusion to draw.

John Chrysostom, then, regarded Pythagoras not only as a philosopher and mathematician, but also as a magician, an attitude that conflated these concepts that was not uncommon in the ancient world. For example, John argues that Pythagoras was a “sorcerer and magician” because his students had faith in him and they regarded his teaching to be true even without rational demonstration. Faith, in John’s formulation, is only to rest in the one true God, however.¹⁴⁴

In the introduction to the group of homilies on the first letter to the Corinthians, John explains that the apostle Paul converted Greeks in Corinth, aligning magic with philosophy. Because of their intimate acquaintance with pagan phi-

144 Chrys. *hom. 1 in 1 Tim.* 3 (PG 62:507): γόνος καὶ μάγος. Similarly, *hom. 2 in Jo.* 2 (PG 59:32).

losophy, “the mother of all evils”, Paul was forced to use a different method of conversion to the one he would have applied *vis-à-vis* “those within the spirit.”¹⁴⁵ John criticises these philosophers for always wanting to find something new, for advancing ideas based on arguments (*logismoi*).¹⁴⁶ Such discussions, he notes, that had encouraged dissent and divided the congregation in Corinth were the work of the devil, undertaken to prevent this large and wealthy city “full of rhetoricians and philosophers” from passing over to the truth. Deliberately or not, John here misattributes the scene of book-burning in Ephesus (according to the Acts of the Apostles) to Corinth: “In this city did those of the sorcerers, who repented, bring together their books and burn them, and there appeared to be fifty thousand.”¹⁴⁷ He also seems to confuse the value of burnt books in silver denomination with their actual number. It is possible that he altered these figures to lend weight to his argument, but the equation of sorcerers and of philosophers is obvious here.

Maintaining his policy of reinforcing the distinctions between Christian and pagan learning, in his sermon *Praise of St Paul* John defends Jesus against charges that he was a magician like the pagan miracle-worker Apollonius:¹⁴⁸

But why do I say that the magicians and charlatans have perished? Why have all of the temples of the gods been extinguished, that of Dodona and that of Clarus, and all of these evil studios fallen silent and shut down?

The work links the termination of the “magicians” to the suppression of pagan culture and acts of temple destruction. In his reading, the relics of the martyrs and the sign of the crucified Jesus caused the demons to tremble. They are shown to flee the name of Jesus as if it was fire. This shows that John regards fire as a means of purification with which to destroy demons. The text makes it clear that Jesus is separate from the philosophers who are “deceivers”, “the large group of magicians”, and “the wise.”¹⁴⁹

145 Chrys. *hom. in 1 Cor.* argumentum (PG 61:11, 12): ὡς πνευματικοῖς (referring to Acts 18:9–10) ... τῶν κακῶν ἡ μήτηρ.

146 Chrys. *hom. in 1 Cor.* argumentum (PG 61:12).

147 Chrys. *hom. in 1 Cor.* argumentum (PG 61:10, 11): καὶ ῥητόρων πολλῶν ἐμπλεως ἡ πόλις καὶ φιλοσόφων ... ἐν ταύτῃ τὰς βίβλους συναγαγόντες τῶν γοήτων οἱ μετανοήσαντες κατέκαυσαν, καὶ ὤφθησαν μυριάδες πέντε.

148 Chrys. *laud. Paul.* 4.8 (SC 300:198–200): καὶ τί λέγω μάγους καὶ γόητας τοὺς σβεσθέντας; πόθεν τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἐπαύθη πάντα, καὶ ὁ Δωδωναῖος, καὶ ὁ Κλάριος, καὶ πάντα τὰ πονηρὰ ταῦτα ἐργαστήρια σιγᾷ καὶ ἐπεστόμισται; Dodona in Epirus had an oracle-temple of Zeus, Clarus in Ionia a temple of Apollo.

149 Chrys. *Laud. Paul.* 4.9 (SC 300:200–202).

Similarly, in an interesting passage, Cyril of Alexandria describes the world before Christianisation as full of temples, idols, demons, divination, oracles and so on, which the gospels had dispersed:¹⁵⁰

The wise men have turned away, their councils have become foolish. He [Isaiah] here seems to call prudent either the magicians among the Greeks – for these were called wise men among the Greeks – or perhaps those who have achieved the reputation of wise men among them...

This is a remarkable statement, as it suggests that to Cyril in the early fifth century the polemical term “magicians” was largely synonymous with the Greek philosophers. This makes it likely that bans on magic books could also comprise philosophical books (or books written in certain philosophical traditions), particularly in monastic contexts, where such interpretations were reasonably attractive.

3.8 Conclusion

While the first reported incident of Christian book-burning dates back to the Acts of the Apostles, there is no other evidence of this practice during the first two centuries. Censorship laws began entering ecclesiastical legislation when it became systematised by the late fourth century and was purported to derive directly from the apostles. While hagiographical texts must be treated with great caution as historical documents, some patterns emerge. Eastern texts were written for a contemporary audience and do not appear to entirely invent narrations on book-burning. As we have seen, the incident of book-burning in Antioch probably in 555, for example, appears to be confirmed by non-hagiographical testimonials. Most of the evidence for book-burning in the East is related to the age of Justinian or reflects the discourses of this time period (as the *Life of Porphyry* appears to suggest). Book-burning and persecutions of pagans and heretics are well attested for the age of Justinian. The earlier hagiographical *Life of Severus* appears to give evidence of book-burning on the basis of eye-witness accounts. However unreliable some of its reports on temple destruction appear to be, it is significant because it mentions authorities (such as the *defensores*) and

¹⁵⁰ Cyr. in *Isaiam* 4.2 (PG 70:944D): ἀπεστράφησαν δὲ καὶ φρόνιμοι εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω, καὶ ἐμωράνθησαν αἱ βουλαὶ αὐτῶν. ἔοικε δὲ φρονίμους ἐν τούτοις, ἢ τοὺς παρ’ Ἑλλήσι μάγους ἀποκαλεῖν ὠνομάζοντο γὰρ παρ’ ἐκείνοις σοφοί· ἢ τάχα που καὶ τοὺς ἐν δόξῃ σοφῶν παρ’ αὐτοῖς γεγονότας.

religious groups (such as the *philóponoi*) acting together to find and destroy books. Texts like these are bellwethers for social and cultural dialogue, written to emphasise the religious zeal of their heroes and the wickedness of the pagan way of life.

It is important to note that, while there is little evidence that Roman authorities were proactive in identifying suspicious books, hagiographical texts suggest that the clergy was empowered either to burn books themselves or to notify the Roman authorities of the whereabouts of suspicious books. The underlying social conflict often was one between poor and rich, staged as a fight against pagan elite-culture. Given the range of imperial censorship laws discussed in the previous chapter, Roman authorities were required to follow up on any notification. While there is little evidence for systematic book-searches, denunciation reportedly was an effective tool for the clergy to learn about suspicious books. We have also seen that denunciation, as can be expected, was motivated by reasons such as personal rivalry or jealousy rather than by purely religious reasons.

In reported cases of deliberate book-burning by zealous Christians, magic books predominate as they were believed to be powerful. It was, then, not so much about censorship of books than about eradicating harmful, demonic powers in the world. While this was not uncommon to the ancient world, however, book-burning came to be more commonly practised probably as a result of magic being associated with illegitimate pagan cult practice. It is also evident that the exact content of these books remains unclear to us. There is some evidence to suggest that either full book stacks owned by pagans were destroyed and that the books in question did not only contain magic spells as is the case with John Foulon's books mentioned by Zacharias. Book-burning is sometimes linked to the destruction of cult statues. It is likely that there were more cases, when cult statues were destroyed along with books, without the latter being explicitly mentioned, as we have seen in the case of Shenoute.

The narrative of these sources suggests that house-searches to find and destroy forbidden books were well-organised. Hagiographical texts depict state authorities, monks and holy men burning books as a strategy in their power struggles (with pagans and within the Christian community) from the fifth century onwards. The evidence is limited to certain regions. Nevertheless, the duration of reported incidents would seem to account for a reduction in interest in keeping and multiplying books on subversive subjects as Christianisation progressed over the course of these centuries. It is even attested that scribes in charge of reproducing books could denounce suspicious texts to Church authorities.

It has also become clear that book-burning was a ritual meant to destroy the demons contained in these books. These demons were thought to have a conta-

gious influence on the owner of the book and potentially on others. They were able to spread diseases and to prevent salvation. The burning of books is therefore linked to the burning of bodies in hellfire. It was meant to be a cure for demonic possession.

Moreover, while there have been ancient precedents to suggest that certain philosophers were characterised as magicians, in Late Antiquity magic and heresy came to be linked more clearly to these philosophical traditions. In the case of heretics, it is particularly clear that there was no exact definition, but it all depended on powerful parties arguing that someone else's opinions, even if long since accepted, were not considered as viable any longer. Heretics were thus not only understood as non-conformist Christians, but occasionally those pagans whose opinions informed Christian-heretical discourse could also be dubbed as heretics in Late Antiquity, as opposed to the modern understanding of the term heresy that is limited to Christians. Along with imperial and ecclesiastical legislation that outlawed magical, heretical and astrological texts, I have argued that within Christian communities an unwillingness arose not only to preserve texts on these subjects but also texts that were related to these genres or were considered the basis for astrological or heretical world-views. Christian polemical discourse and censorship legislation may have somewhat reinforced each other. While treatises and sermons had little impact on public authorities, we have seen that censorship and book-burning laws were often carried out by the clergy which was more likely to agree with ecclesiastical texts than any state authority.

We have therefore seen that Christian authors regarded a number of texts and ideas as devilish, including those pertaining to astrology, magic, divination and pagan philosophy. This does not, however, mean that Christian intellectuals regarded any kind of pagan philosophy as demonical, magical or heretical and as unworthy of preservation. In the next chapter I shall therefore look into what differences and similarities existed between books of astrology (and astronomy), magic, divination and philosophy, what was considered to be helpful, what was considered to be devilish and who defined the line between good and evil.

4 Materialist Philosophy

In the previous chapters, I have discussed the reported incidents of book-burning in Late Antiquity, the reliability of sources, the range of texts that could be targeted, and in cases where the evidence presents itself how and why they were targeted. This chapter will analyse the reasons why texts associated with materialist philosophies were vulnerable to destruction. Although in most cases, Roman authorities or zealous Christians burnt magic books, we have seen that the evidence suggests that a broader range of genres could have been vulnerable to destruction – whether deliberately or unconsciously as part of a wider legislative or authoritative remit. In most cases the actual titles of books that were destroyed are unknown. This lack of specificity is not blanket, however. There is one instance in the *Life of Severus* where titles are mentioned. In this case the books that ended in a bonfire did not contain magical spells, but literary texts related to pagan religion, magic and astrology. I have also noted that some individuals may have burnt philosophical treatises when renouncing their past. When books containing an unspecified range of liberal arts were destroyed in Antioch at the end of the fourth century, it is reported that book owners responded by burning their personal libraries across the Eastern empire and this allegedly caused the death of pagan philosophy. Furthermore, if the information given in the anonymous *Life of Symeon* is trustworthy, then it appears that state authorities searched out and destroyed books associated not only with magic, astrology, and heresy, but also those containing pagan (religious) texts as well as Epicurean traditions in the East during the age of Justinian. There is evidence that whole libraries owned by pagans were deliberately destroyed during book-searches, notably in the case of Shenoute, who authored treatises specifically against pagan philosophers. Imperial and other censorship laws specifically defined and targeted books on magic, astrology, heresy and philosophical works that were considered hostile to Christianity. The wording of these laws is rather general, and banned texts could include illegitimate inquiries into nature. The evidence suggests that these censorship and book-burning laws were occasionally enforced, albeit with varying degrees of vigour. Books, of course, may have burnt more often than is known from sources.

The main reason of why books disappeared, however, was neglect. As well as a natural process incumbent on the materials involved in the productions of early texts, neglect was sometimes encouraged by exhortation or religious reservation. The deliberate refusal to copy or preserve books can thus be seen as an act of censorship when authoritative exhortation is involved and this refusal is in accordance with the legal norms of that time. These exhortations and reserva-

tions can today be discerned in Christian treatises and sermons of Late Antiquity. While it is accepted that many avowedly Christian authors since Antiquity were appreciative of the writings of Plato, I will show that there was general agreement that the old materialist philosophies were fundamentally incompatible with Christian doctrine. The remaining philosophical traditions were often labeled as heretical, magical, or pagan as a result. This is a key point to establish as it links to the idea that books were not so much actively destroyed by burning, but were simply allowed to fall into abeyance by deliberate neglect or refusal to record philosophical traditions that had survived in oral culture. Obvious places where these traditions could have continued to be discussed were the institutes of higher learning, such as academies and gymnasia.

Christian authors of Late Antiquity sometimes perceived classical traditions as competing discourses, but their attitudes were clearly ambiguous and many Christian authors quoted the classics as long as they continued to be instructed in these classical authors in their early education. In this chapter I will show that Christian authors of Late Antiquity were much more concerned about ancient materialist philosophies, especially about Epicureanism, than they were about most other literary traditions of Antiquity. In Late Antiquity Epicureanism was hardly a robust, living tradition. I shall therefore discuss the reasons why there was a persistent Christian debate against this school in particular. We have also seen that there is evidence to suggest that texts associated with Epicurean traditions were allegedly among the books that were searched out and destroyed in the age of Justinian. I shall therefore also argue that the specifically Christian disdain for Epicurean ideas, because of their link to heresy, was potentially serious enough to cause individuals to actually destroy these texts as heretical texts rather than to simply persuade others not to believe in these texts. While it should be clear that criticism and competition between different groups usually does not result into book-burning or censorship, I shall argue that the irreconcilability between Christianity and certain materialist philosophical ideas could actually be the turning point that led individuals either to actively get rid of these texts or to deliberately refuse to copy these in order to prevent their circulation. I shall first briefly introduce the history of materialist philosophy, paying special attention to its continuation into the Roman period and the transmission of related texts. I shall then give an outline of the possible conflicts that evolved around the spread of Christianity in the early centuries and finally discuss the ongoing Christian engagement with these philosophical ideas in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. In doing so, I shall point to rhetorical strategies that Christian authors (for example, Augustine) employed to align certain philosophical texts with the illegal areas of astrology, magic and divination, arguing that a broad consensus was established to dismiss materialist philosoph-

ical ideologies as dangerous to the unity of Christianity. Its ideological and cultural censoring can be positioned as having a negative influence on the survival of, and interest in, these philosophical traditions.

4.1 Materialist Philosophies in Late Antiquity

According to Whitehead, the European philosophical tradition after Antiquity is a footnote to Plato. Yet contrary to the perception that Platonism is the zenith of ancient philosophy, Platonism in fact enjoyed relatively little status and intellectual currency during the first centuries AD, emerging only as the dominant philosophical school from the third century onwards. Literary and epigraphic evidence suggests that up until the early third century, the Stoics and Epicureans were the dominant philosophical schools, especially among the cultural elites.¹ These strands originated in the age of Hellenism and often built on pre-Socratic philosophical ideas. While often associated with old philosophers like Epicurus (341–270), it is more persuasive to think of these schools as an ongoing tradition. The reasons for their institutional decline during the third century are unclear for want of sources.² It seems that, unlike Christianity, members of these philosophical schools had little to answer to the military and economical turmoil during the third-century crisis. Nevertheless, it is also unclear how long these philosophies continued to be alive in the sense of a cultural tradition.

Within the context of these philosophical ideologies, Platonism can be positioned as an idealistic philosophy, placing the mind as superior to the material world. By contrast, the Stoics and Epicureans may be considered materialist philosophies. Although there are other authors and schools which shared similar views in Antiquity, in this book I will use the term materialist philosophies primarily in relation to these groups. Both of these schools often focused on natural philosophy whose enquiries into nature and the material principles underpinning reality foregrounded their interest in the material world. By contrast, and at times in competition with these views, early Christian authors focused on idealistic issues, stressing the importance of God and of the soul of men.

As a consequence of the circumstances outlined above regarding the survival of ancient texts there is little representative extant writing of these dominant philosophical schools from the age of Hellenism and the Roman imperial period.

¹ See Brunt (1975); Maier (1985).

² See Hahn (2007) on the marginalisation of Stoic and Epicurean philosophy during the third-century crisis.

It is probable that most of the original texts by ancient materialist philosophers would have already been lost in pre-Christian times (that is before the fourth century). Where Christian authors quoted these philosophies it is therefore likely that they were relying on secondary quotations. In the case of the Epicureans, the extant ancient writings, such as Cicero's *De natura deorum*, tend to criticise and reject Epicurean philosophy both for its perceived moral hedonism and its physical explanations. Nevertheless, Cicero attested the popularity of Latin works written in the Epicurean tradition in Italy.³ Our view is thus likely distorted by the dearth of writings that endorse this philosophy, although Epicurus himself and his school had often been received as controversial.

An exception to this proposition is the work of the Stoic philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius that is extant today. The Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum near Pompeii, buried under the ashes of the Vesuvius since the first century AD, has revealed fragments of approximately 1,800 papyri scrolls by the local Epicurean philosopher Philodemus. Diogenes Laertius probably in the mid-third century AD wrote a history of philosophy that contains quotations from the old philosophers (including Epicurus) that indicate a primary knowledge of the relevant texts. Epicurean texts still circulated at the end of the second and well into the third century. A papyrus from the Egyptian countryside, probably from the late second century AD, confirms this as does a second-century inscription from Turkey.⁴ There are even a few testimonials about rivaling pagan groups burning Epicurean books, or recommending these books to be burnt, from the late second to early third century.⁵ However, it must also be noted that philosophy in Antiquity, similarly to the doctrines of some mystery religions, had mostly been the realm of a minority of initiates. Disseminating these ideas in writing was not always considered to be appropriate, and we therefore have to assume that, despite the availability of certain philosophical texts, many ideas circulated orally rather than through mass-produced writings. This is consistent with the view that, while there was something like professional book publishers, most books of lesser importance circulated as private copies, especially in Late

³ Cic. *Tusc.* 4.3.7: *post Amafinium autem multi eiusdem aemuli rationis multa cum scripsissent, Italiam totam occupaverunt*; with Cic. *acad.* 1.6: *iam vero physica, si Epicurum id est si Democritum probarem, possem scribere ita plane ut Amafinius. quid est enim magnum, cum causas rerum efficientium sustuleris, de corpusculorum (ita enim appellat atomos) concursione fortuita loqui?*; Cic. *fin.* 1.7.25: *tam multi sint Epicurei*.

⁴ Keenan (1977); Smith (1993).

⁵ Lucian, *Alex.* 47; Aelian, *fr.* 39, 89 Hercher (vol. 2:200–202; 230–31), 42a Domingo-Forasté. On a discussion, Sarefield (2004), 125–41.

Antiquity.⁶ At this point, the oral culture was still in competition with the written.

In the Latin corpus, Seneca's lengthy Stoic treatises are among the few philosophical texts still extant. Although many other titles of Latin tragedies are known and at least some of his tragedies were probably written by someone else, Seneca is the only author whose tragedies have survived. His survival can be attributed to his appreciation by Christian readers. To the Christian apologist Tertullian, writing at around 200, he was "often our Seneca."⁷ Similarly, in the fourth century Jerome inserted Seneca in his catalogue of Christian authors, attesting to a collection of letters allegedly exchanged between Seneca and the apostle Paul.⁸

However, in an important article, Schmid argued against the assumption that Epicureanism was dead in the fourth and fifth centuries; in fact, it is possible that even original writings by Epicurus circulated in the second half of the fourth century.⁹ Schmid has not taken into account the evidence provided by Suidas, attesting that Marcianus, a Christian presbyter in Caesarea in Cappadocia in around 479, became acquainted with Epicurean traditions under the emperor Zeno (474–491) and was therefore considered a heretic as having secret foreknowledge on the movements of the stars. This is important because it shows that the idea that the movements of stars and planets was caused by mechanical principles rather than by divine arrangement continued to exist at least well into the late fifth century and was clearly associated with Epicurean atomism, divination and heresy.¹⁰ Marcianus was a member of the imperial family and he apparently used his foreknowledge to support his rebellion against Zeno as did others at that time, as we have seen in section 2.6.¹¹ This again

⁶ See Schipke (2013), 169–223.

⁷ Tert. *anim.* 20: *Seneca saepe noster*.

⁸ Hier. *vir. ill.* 12. See Hagendahl (1983), 80–82.

⁹ Schmid (1962), 772–90, esp. 783: Bas. *ep.* 11, based on von der Mühl.

¹⁰ Suid. s.v. Μαρκιανός, 209 Adler: "this deviator was corrupting himself daily with Epicurean teachings and he said that the universe was self-existent and ordered not by God, but by the forces of the stars. For in so far as each of them will come first carried around together because of their rotation, they obtain superiority according to the momentum of those that are generating it" (οὗτος ὁ πλάνος καὶ τοῖς Ἐπικουρείοις δόγμασιν ὁσημέραι αὐτὸν κακύνων, αὐτοφυῇ ἔλεγε τὸν κόσμον καὶ διοικεῖσθαι οὐκ ἐκ θεοῦ, ἀλλ' ἐξ ἐνεργείας τῆς τῶν ἀστέρων. καθὼ γὰρ ἕκαστον αὐτῶν τῇ τοῦτων φθάσει συμπεριφερόμενον δινήσει, τῶν κατ' αὐτὴν τικτομένων τὴν ῥοπὴν τὴν ἐπικρατείαν κληροῦνται).

¹¹ *PLRE* 2, Marcianus 17, 717–18.

shows that Epicureanism was closely linked to astrology from a Christian perspective. Investigating this, I will argue that there is evidence that Epicurean and other materialist philosophical traditions, albeit marginalised, were still known in Late Antiquity. This is to prove my point that treatises associated with these traditions could well have circulated in the sixth century and that the anonymous author of the *Life of Simeon* is therefore right that these books were searched out and destroyed in the age of Justinian, as we have seen in section 2.8.

An important testimonial on the survival of Epicurean texts is a letter by the last pagan emperor and Neoplatonic philosopher Julian (361–363). He ordered that pagan priests should not read the philosophical works of Epicurus and Pyrrho, attributing it to the good will of the gods that most books by the Epicurean and Pyrrhonic philosophers had perished already in his time.¹² With regard to the works of Pyrrhon, Eusebius of Caesarea says that this philosopher had himself left nothing in writing.¹³ This indicates that Julian was thinking of philosophical schools rather than of the works by the school founders themselves. Taken at face value, Julian's statement implies that the works of these philosophical schools were not entirely lost at that time, especially since at least some of the large libraries of Antiquity still existed. Julian would hardly have felt it necessary to bar people from reading literature that did not exist anymore.

While Alan Cameron brought forward evidence that pagans and Christians studied the same texts of classical authors in the West of the late fourth and fifth century, he also came to the conclusion that the last pagans of Rome, unlike their Christian peers, were interested in some of these old philosophies. Macrobius, author of a book on pagan antiquities, and Servius, commentator of Vergil, display knowledge of natural philosophy, for example, albeit probably based on secondary quotations (especially from the late antique philosophers Plotinus and Porphyry). Similarly, pagan senators such as Praetextatus and Nicomachus Flavianus demonstrate considerable philosophical expertise and interest and refer to pagan religious writing and old philosophers such as Epicurus, although this too is probably from secondary quotations.¹⁴ Marius Victorinus, however, a rhetoric professor who taught senators, translated the original Aristotle and Porphyry from Greek to Latin in Rome of the mid-fourth century before he converted

¹² Jul. *ep.* 89:300C–301C, at 301C (Bidez 1.2, 168–9, at 169): μήτε Ἐπικούρειος εἰσίτω λόγος μήτε Πυρρώνειος· ἤδη μὲν γὰρ καλῶς ποιοῦντες οἱ θεοὶ καὶ ἀνηρήκασιν, ὥστε ἐπιλείπειν καὶ τὰ πλεῖστα τῶν βιβλίων.

¹³ Eus. *p.e.* 14.18.2.

¹⁴ See Alan Cameron (2011), 387–9, 395, 531–46.

and devoted himself to theology; but there is no firm evidence that Greek philosophical texts were studied in late fourth-century Rome.¹⁵

The only piece of Epicurean philosophy that survived as a whole is the Latin poem *On the nature of things* (*De rerum natura*), authored by Lucretius in the first century BC. The transmission of this work was fortuitous as it was apparently based on a single copy, of unknown origin, from around 800.¹⁶ Lucretius gave a popular version of Epicurean philosophy, designed to be received by a broader audience, conflicting with the traditional view that philosophy was to be made known only to the selected few. He followed the Epicurean teaching that the universe consists of atoms, which are invisible, impartible, uncreated and mechanically moving in the infinite (1.483–634). The universe is indefinite, not intelligently designed and has an infinite number of centres that attract bodies because of their weight (1.998–1082). There are different but limited types of atoms, with each type existing in infinite number (2.333–568). Within the universe void and time exist (1.265–482). The atoms are dragged down to earth because of their weight (2.184–332). The world as we know it came into existence with the clash of atoms (5.416–508). He also proposed the theory of evolution by natural selection (5.772–1457). As a consequence, Lucretius argued against religious fear of gods (*religio*), because gods have neither created the world nor are they the cause for any intimidating natural phenomena, such as lightning, vulcanism and the plague, which are more properly explained as natural occurrences (5.1161–6.1286). A significant impact on Latin authors, Lucretius' work was probably based on contemporary scientific handbooks as well as recent Epicurean philosophers.¹⁷

It is probable that Lucretius was read until the fourth century. Christian authors of Late Antiquity, such as Arnobius and Prudentius, imitated Lucretian style and borrowed from his ideas. Lactantius and Jerome also both refer to Lucretius but as a possessed madman.¹⁸ However, there is no firm evidence that Lucretius continued to be read after c. 400. Isidore of Seville still mentions him in the seventh century, but he was based only on second-hand sources, that is the polemics of earlier ecclesiastical authors.¹⁹

¹⁵ Alan Cameron (2011), 218–20, 566.

¹⁶ Von Albrecht (1994), 246; Butterfield (2013) on the transmission of the text.

¹⁷ Von Albrecht (1994), 231–4.

¹⁸ Lact. *opif.* 6.1; Hier. *chron.*, a. Abr. 1923, 94 BC (GCS 47:149).

¹⁹ Von Albrecht (1994), 247–9. On Isidore see p. 281, note 88, p. 284, note 111 and p. 291, note 145 below.

There is also a virtual silence on Lucretius throughout the Middle Ages until the Renaissance scholar Poggio discovered a manuscript in a German monastery in 1418, probably in Murbach.²⁰ He had been granted papal permission to search for lost books “in the libraries or rather dungeons of the Germans.”²¹ As a result of this chance discovery and the dissemination of Lucretian ideas, many modern philosophers, scientists or poets became influenced by this school of thought, notably Giordano Bruno and his student Vanini, Galileo (while the first two were burnt alive for heresy and magic, the latter was held in year-long custody), Newton, Rousseau, Voltaire, Kant, Nietzsche and Marx. Newton, for example, traced his gravitational theory to Anaxagoras, Pythagoras, Epicurus and Lucretius, and he worked through the idea of the Epicurean swerve of atoms (Lucr. 2.216–62), which later influenced Einstein.²²

There are some other indications that non-Platonic philosophical traditions survived in Late Antiquity. Schouler’s very extensive study on the pagan literary tradition in Libanius (c. 314–393), the pagan city-rhetor of Antioch, found that throughout he occasionally mentioned ancient philosophers otherwise now lost (p. 515–18, 561–2) and quoted classical poets and prose authors, such as historians. Libanius also often describes pagan cult traditions in different regions (p. 696–745). Interestingly, while his work reflects discourses on natural philosophy and scientific explanations (p. 776–802) most of the old philosophers are mentioned only in enumerations and anecdotal allusions. The exception is Pythagoras, whose doctrines appear to be still studied, and Protagoras, whose writings are occasionally quoted (p. 516–18). Schouler concluded that Libanius was informed by secondary transmission, probably from exercise books used in his school rather than via exposure to the original writings (p. 572). Similarly, Maas collected evidence for the ancient authorities quoted by John the Lydian in the age of Justinian (527–565).²³ With regard to ancient philosophy, John was demonstrably relying on secondary references, primarily from a first-century neo-Pythagorean compendium rather than the original texts.²⁴ Moreover, while it is difficult to accurately ascertain which pagan authors were known to Augustine, it seems that, besides classical authors, he was acquainted with texts

20 It should, however, be noted that Nicholas of Autrecourt reintroduced ancient atomism to the scholastic world before the rediscovery of Lucretius. He was convicted of heresy and ordered to burn his incriminated writings in 1346/47.

21 Poggio, *ep.* 9.32 Tonelli: *ex bibliothecis, ne dicam ergastulis Germanorum*.

22 See Passanante (2011); von Albrecht (1994), 249–55 with literature; Sorabij (1983), 372.

23 List of quotations by Lydus in the appendix of Maas (1992), 119–37; for some ancient authors his is the only testimony.

24 Maas (1992), 59–60; Robbins (1921), 97–123.

less known, for example Stoic semiotics.²⁵ As I shall argue in the next section, the reason for the eventual decline of materialist philosophies had to do with the rise of Christianity.

4.2 Christianity and Ancient Materialist Philosophy

During the first centuries, Christian proselytizers disseminated their ideas in the Forum and other public places in direct competition with contemporary philosophers, especially from the Stoic and Epicurean schools. I shall argue that this disagreement and competition informed the desire of late antique Christian authors to get rid of these traditions. In direct, competitive public and ideological competition, we will see how early Christian apologists worked to position these philosophical schools as the origin of heresy in the world and as literary traditions that were inspired by demons. It is likely that early Christian monastic movements were also involved in competition with similar pagan movements, like the Pythagorean and Cynic. For example, in the biblical Acts of the Apostles, Paul has discussions with materialist philosophers in Athens:²⁶

Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, ‘what will this babblers say?’, others, ‘he seems to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.’

Continuing, Paul emphasises the uselessness of pagan religion and of religious statues in view of the Final Judgment and Resurrection. It is productive to read this verse against his Letter to the Colossians: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the elements of the world, and not after Christ.”²⁷ Much scholarly debate has centred on the meaning of the “elements of the world” in this context and which vain philosophy Paul was alluding to. The various interpretations can be broadly divided between Jewish-Gnostic, Hellenistic Syncretism and Hellenistic Philosophy.²⁸

²⁵ See Pollmann (1996), 158–67; Hagendahl (1967), *passim*; on prose authors, 667–90; see Aug. *ep.* 135.1 on the range of Augustine’s acquaintance with philosophy.

²⁶ Acts 17:18: τινες δὲ καὶ τῶν Ἐπικουρείων καὶ Στοϊκῶν φιλοσόφων συνέβαλλον αὐτῷ, καὶ τινες ἔλεγον· τί ἂν θέλοι ὁ σπερμολόγος οὗτος λέγειν; οἱ δὲ, Ἐένων δαϊμονίων δοκεῖ καταγγελεὺς εἶναι, ὅτι τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν εὐηγγελίζετο. And see de Witt (1954).

²⁷ Col. 2:8: βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν.

²⁸ See DeMaris (1994), 18–40.

While I cannot answer this question in its biblical context, my argument is that later Christian authors like Augustine interpreted this verse as referring to ancient philosophies, especially the old materialist philosophies of the Stoics and Epicureans. While Augustine was appreciative of Platonic philosophy and frequently endorses Platonic views in the *City of God*, he discouraged the average Christian from acquaintance with materialist philosophies. This is clear in his interpretations of the Letter to the Colossians: “A Christian educated only in the literature of the Church” may be unaware even of the Platonists, but this should not hold him back from reading the Platonists, although only insofar as they agree with Christian theologians on God, the soul, and created nature.²⁹ He should, he warns, certainly beware of the materialist philosophies because they oppose creation. In doing so, Augustine quotes from the Letter to the Colossians:³⁰

He will, however, beware of those who practise philosophy ‘after the elements of the world’ and not after God, by whom the world itself was made. For he is admonished by the precept of the apostle, and faithfully hears what has been said: ‘Beware lest anyone spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the elements of the world.’

This shows that philosophical views on the origin and physical consistence of the world if opposed to the biblical creation account were considered most inappropriate. Augustine further argued that philosophical views underpinning the Christological controversies of Late Antiquity were similarly inappropriate for the Christian reader. In the context of describing the apostles having triumphed over the philosophers, Augustine thus notes that there are “only a very few of the learned or unlearned left” who do not believe in incarnation (which was in accordance neither with atomistic materiality of the soul as posited by the Epicureans nor with Pythagorean transmigration of souls). Augustine goes on to say that the incarnation of Jesus “those with whom we are dealing refuse to believe.”³¹ This statement suggests that Augustine regards as his adversaries people who still put forward ideas from materialist philosophy. It is interesting to

²⁹ Aug. civ. 8.10 (CCSL 47:226): *homo Christianus litteris tantum ecclesiasticis eruditus*.

³⁰ Aug. civ. 8.10 (CCSL 47:226): *cavet eos tamen, qui secundum elementa huius mundi philosophantur, non secundum deum, a quo ipse factus est mundus. admonetur enim praecepto apostolico fideliterque audit quod dictum est: cavete ne quis vos decipiat per philosophiam et inanem seductionem secundum elementa mundi*, referring to Col. 2:8.

³¹ Aug. civ. 22.5 (CCSL 48:810, 811): *paucissimis remanentibus atque stupentibus vel doctis vel indoctis ... nolunt isti, cum quibus agimus, credere*. Similarly, Aug. civ. 18.49–50.

note that he had similar concerns about the *mathematici*.³² This again shows that a grey area existed between these groups.

The conflict is clear: where materialist philosophers did not believe in the possibility of incarnation and resurrection, Jesus' resurrection had overcome the death barrier. In doing so, he had redeemed Christians from the life–death cycle, as is noted in the Letter to the Galatians:³³

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.

I have demonstrated that Christian authors borrowed from Plato in using (Greek) children as a periphrase for ancient philosophers and their followers. But in the immediate context, the metaphysical origins of the conflict are clear. In the Second Epistle of Peter, it is argued that these elements (the physical substance of the material world) will melt for the Second Coming of Christ:³⁴

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

This eschatological aspect of Christianity was popularly adopted in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, when the fall of the Roman Empire, military invasions and natural disasters all contributed to a pervading feeling that the end

³² Aug. *gen. ad litt.* 2.17 (CCSL 28.1:61): “A good Christian must therefore beware of either the *mathematici* or anyone who impiously practises divination, especially when they say the truth, lest they deceive his soul by their fellowship with demons and ensnare it in some treaty of association.” (*quapropter bono christiano sive mathematici sive quilibet in pie divinantium, maxime dicentes vera, cavendi sunt, ne consortio daemoniorum animam deceptam pacto quodam societatis inretiant*).

³³ Gal. 4:3–5: οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς, ὅτε ἦμεν νήπιοι, ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ἡμεθα δεδουλωμένοι· ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον, ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον ἐξαγοράσῃ.

³⁴ 2Pet. 3:10–12: ἥξει δὲ ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτῃς ἐν ἧ ἡ οἱ οὐρανοὶ ῥοιζηδὸν παρελεύσονται, στοιχεῖα δὲ καυσούμενα λυθήσεται, καὶ γῆ καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ ἔργα εὐρεθήσεται. τούτων οὕτως πάντων λυομένων ποταποὺς δεῖ ὑπάρχειν ὑμᾶς ἐν ἀγίαις ἀναστροφαῖς καὶ εὐσεβείαις προσδοκῶντας καὶ σπεύδοντας τὴν παρουσίαν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμέρας δι’ ἣν οὐρανοὶ πυρούμενοι λυθήσονται καὶ στοιχεῖα καυσούμενα τήκεται.

of the world could be near. According to this interpretation, Christ becomes actual substance. It implies a literal reading of the biblical text (cf. Col. 2:17).

In their drive to distinguish between orthodoxy and competing discourses as heretical, Christian authors positioned themselves within this dialectic from early on, while often excluding philosophical elements as forbidden. In particular, to many Christian authors, the biblical figure of Simon Magus served as the prototype for illegitimate writing associated with heresy and magic. An example of this, from the late second century is the apologist Irenaeus who attributed the then popular Gnostic systems to the works of Simon Magus, “from whom all heresies derive their origin.”³⁵ In the Acts of the Apostles it is alleged that Simon took money in exchange for curing people with the aid and in the name of the Holy Spirit when in fact he had used “sorcery” to effect his cures.³⁶ Simon himself was also charged with having borrowed from philosophers such as Empedocles.³⁷ This means that he resorted to demons to provide miracle-healing in competition with Christianity.

Some of the first Christian authors even went as far as to exclude classical authors from their discourse of orthodoxy. For example, Justin Martyr (d. in around 165 at Rome) felt persecuted by the demons/gods of poetry as causing heresy, while feeling pity for the readers.³⁸ His student Tatian believed that the universe is governed by God and therefore linked alternative explanations to the influence of demons: “How can I believe someone who says that the sun is a red-hot mass and the moon an earth?”³⁹ Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in the second century, claimed that his Christian adversaries had borrowed ideas from comic poets and from ancient, particularly Pythagorean and Epicurean philosophers, with their concepts of atoms and the vacuum,⁴⁰ and as such were to be burnt in hell.⁴¹

Having been established, this dialectic was reinforced over a clear trajectory of similar judgments and pronouncements. Half a century after Justin, Tertullian in North Africa formulated the *locus classicus* for the mutual imbrication of heresy and ancient philosophy, and their clear distinction and division from Christianity: “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem, the Platonic Academy

³⁵ Iren. *haer.* 1.23.2: *ex quo universae haereses substituerunt.*

³⁶ Acts 8:9–24.

³⁷ Hipp. *haer.* 6.11.

³⁸ Just. 1 *apol.* 44, 57–8.

³⁹ Tat. *orat.* 27.2: πῶς πεισθήσομαι τῷ λέγοντι μύδρον τὸν ἥλιον καὶ τὴν σελήνην γῆν;

⁴⁰ Iren. *haer.* 2.14.2–3 and 6.

⁴¹ Iren. *haer.* 4.26.2.

with the Church, heretics with Christians?”⁴² He explicitly aligned this judgment with the above-quoted statement on philosophy after the elements of the world in the Letters to the Colossians, restating the Christian position in the biblical text. Therefore, “heresies themselves are adorned with philosophy.” In this context, the Platonic, Stoic and Epicurean philosophies were each aligned with heretical groups: “The same material is reconsidered by the heretics and the philosophers; the same repeated discussions are involved.”⁴³ However, it must be noted that all these Christian authors were themselves highly educated and may have thought differently about the usefulness of these philosophies than they publicly announced in writing. Rather than eliminating philosophy from religious discourse they wanted to put obsolete questions aside.

These cultural and ideological distinctions became increasingly reinforced as Christian hegemony increased, while on the other hand Christian authors started to integrate into their theology some of the opinions of ancient philosophers, such as Plato. For example, an early fourth-century passage from Athanasius of Alexandria links “magical” and philosophical “Greek” books to prove the divinity of Jesus. Athanasius is therefore an example of a Christian author who demonises books as carriers of evil literary traditions. In his sermon on incarnation, Athanasius condemns “idolatry, the whole army of the demons” which he explains as being “the whole of the magical art and the whole of the wisdom of the Greeks.” To Athanasius, it is a divine mission to persuade “those who previously worshipped idols” to smash them and to make “those who admired the magical treacheries [...] burn the books written on this art.” Significantly, Athanasius suggests that “even the philosophers prefer the interpretation of the gospels to everything else” and give up what they previously admired.⁴⁴ In the beginning of this speech Athanasius specifically singles out the Epicurean school of philosophy because of its incommensurability with the divine interpretation of creation and providence. Where Christianity attributed everything to God’s

⁴² Tert. praescr. 7: *quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis? quid academiae et ecclesiae? quid haereticis et Christianis?* Similarly, *apol.* 46; *idol.* 9–10.

⁴³ Tert. praescr. 7: *ipsae denique haereses a philosophia subornantur. ... eadem materia apud haereticos et philosophos volutatur, idem retractatus implicantur.*

⁴⁴ Ath. inc. 53.1 (SC 199:454): τίς πώποτε ἄνθρωπος ἀπλῶς ἢ μάγος, ἢ τύραννος, ἢ βασιλεὺς, ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ τοσοῦτον ἡδυνήθη βαλεῖν, καὶ καθ’ ὅλης τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας καὶ πάσης δαιμονικῆς στρατίας καὶ πάσης μαγείας καὶ πάσης σοφίας Ἑλλήνων, τοσοῦτον ἰσχυόντων καὶ ἔτι ἀκμαζόντων καὶ ἐκπληττόντων πάντας, ἀντιμάχεσθαι καὶ μᾶλλον ῥοπῇ κατὰ πάντων ἀντιστῆναι, ὡς ὁ ἡμέτερος Κύριος, ὁ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀληθὴς Λόγος, ὃς ἀοράτως ἐκάστου τὴν πλάνην ἐλέγχων, μόνος παρὰ πάντων τοὺς πάντας ἀνθρώπους σκυλεύει, ὥστε τοὺς μὲν τὰ εἰδῶλα προσκυνοῦντας λοιπὸν αὐτὰ καταπατεῖν, τοὺς δὲ μαγείας θαυμασθέντας τὰς βίβλους κατακαίειν, τοὺς δὲ σοφοὺς τὴν τῶν Εὐαγγελίων προκρίνειν πάντων ἔρμηνειαν. With 53.2.

will, Epicureans argued that everything is fortuitous (*automátos*).⁴⁵ In fact, various Christian authors counted Epicureanism as a heresy because of this reason.⁴⁶ In context, Athanasius takes a different tack from previous commentators on the Christian–heretic dialectic. Rather than only refuting philosophical texts against the concept of the resurrection, he argues that these discourses are dying out naturally as people are now more interested in fighting the demons. Paganism, he suggests, is dying naturally.⁴⁷

In his work *Against the Pagans* (c. 303), the Christian apologist Arnobius also followed the polemical discourse of other Christian authors, rejecting the scientific explanations of the material world proposed by philosophers such as the Epicureans in favour of biblical explanations. Writing in immediate response to the Great Persecution, he argues that scientific explanations detract from knowing the truth, namely that God created the world and is responsible for various natural occurrences (2.56–61). Arnobius juxtaposes scientific explanations with magical practices (2.62). This is important because we have already seen that some Christian authors tended to align certain philosophical ideas with magic.

Similarly, in book three of the *Divine Institutes* Lactantius, Arnobius' student, refutes many of the old philosophers. Mirroring other Christian authors, he is especially hostile towards Epicurus. Lactantius presents Epicurus' teaching as based largely on joy/pleasure (*voluptas*), suggesting that this is why Epicurean teaching was so successful and positioning Epicurean teaching as opposed to Christian teaching and Epicurus' natural man opposed to the martyr: "To the man who is incapable of suffering and spoiled, it is said that pain is the greatest of all evils; to the brave man, it is said that it is wise to be happy even under tortures."⁴⁸

Lactantius polemicized against Epicurean atomism, because he thought it absurd that atoms (*corpuscula*) are invisible, limited in number, and by cohesion in varied order and position compose the various objects of the material world, without divine providence (3.17.16–25) or, in modern terminology, intelligent design. He also argued that it was absurd that "they cannot be divided by the edge of any weapon" (3.17.26: *nulla ferri acie dissici valeant*), suggesting that the exis-

⁴⁵ Ath. inc. 2.1.

⁴⁶ Some examples, besides those mentioned throughout this book, are Hier. in Is. 7.18.1/3 (= PL 24:247A); Epiph. *panarion* 1.1.8 (Holl 1:186). And see Schmid (1962), 799–803; Laßwitz (1890), 11–30.

⁴⁷ Especially, Ath. inc. 47–8.

⁴⁸ Lact. inst. 3.17.5: *impatienti ac delicato dolorem esse omnium malorum maximum dicitur, forti etiam in tormentis beatum esse sapientem.*

tence of atoms undermined the probability of the soul's afterlife because the soul too would therefore consist of atoms that would perish along with the body (3.17.30–36). If this was the case, people would not need to fear punishments in hell and may as well indulge in joy (3.17.42: *inferorum poenas non esse metuentes*). Lactantius' work, then, is significant as it extends the arguments of Arnobius in engaging with the tensions between Christian and pagan discourses and their competition for primacy in the context of the imperial edicts concerning illegitimate texts.

While I have not intended to give a full survey of attitudes of early Christian apologists toward materialist philosophies, it should have become clear that these discourses informed the ongoing rivalry between both groups once Christianity was the state religion and Epicureanism and similar traditions had become somewhat negligible, as I shall argue in the following sections.

Within this context, Augustine has often been positioned as an outstanding representative of Western philosophy. While this is certainly true insofar as one specifically Christian notion of philosophy is concerned and insofar Augustine was a well-educated academic in his age and not infrequently quoted ancient authorities, scholars so far have paid scarce attention to the evidence of Augustine dismissing many other materialistic ancient schools, repeatedly bringing up the idea of the death of their memory. In the following two sections, then, I shall read Augustine's letter to Dioscorus in order to establish Augustine's attitude towards non-Platonic philosophy and his discussion of censorship in the eschatological *City of God*, alongside some other relevant letters and sermons. My argument is that Augustine influentially put forward the view that literary traditions associated with materialist philosophies (and related books as carriers of these ideas) should have no place in Christian society because of their demonic nature.

4.3 Augustine's Letter to Dioscorus

Augustine (354–430) was a Manichaean who became a teacher of rhetoric and grammar. When he converted to Christianity in 386 he stopped teaching, devoting his time to writing 33 treatises against Manichaeism. Later in his life, as his attitude hardened, he criticised his early Christian writings, such as *Contra Academicos*, as dealing too favourably with Platonic philosophy.⁴⁹ In his autobiographic *Confessions*, composed shortly after he became bishop of Hippo Regius

⁴⁹ Aug. *retract.* pr. 3; 1.1.4; Krämer (2007), 12.

in 395, Augustine disapproves of his having previously taught the classics. He did not criticise literacy as such but only becoming acquainted with this skill through introduction in classical poetry.⁵⁰ He also disapproved of his previous endorsement of Epicurean philosophy.⁵¹ This again shows that Manichaeans like the young Augustine were followers of Epicurean traditions. Thus a figure of tensions emerges: on the one hand, a classically educated scholar, a man who had knowledge of pagan philosophies and concepts; on the other, a committed Christian, determinedly opposed to them, excepting Platonic philosophy. As a scholar, he frequently engaged in discussions with pagans and Christians about classical scholarly themes, including classical philosophy. His particular thrust in his various works and letters much depended on the audience or correspondent he addressed. It is therefore important to stress that the passages discussed in this book may appear to be somewhat selected, but I am not aware of any instances where he speaks favourably about materialist philosophies in contexts of the physical understanding of the world.

Augustine's correspondence with Dioscorus (letters 117 and 118) is among his best known letters, but has hitherto not been discussed as an important polemical attack against Greek philosophical traditions. I shall read this text as a unique document for the circulation of philosophical knowledge in various regions of the Roman Empire at this time as well as its suppression caused by Christianity, arguing that while the opinions of the materialist philosophers were largely – but not completely – forgotten at this time, Augustine was concerned that these opinions continued to inform both pagans and heretics and that he was worried that these ideas could survive in writing or oral tradition.

It is therefore significant that Dioscorus was a wealthy Greek student of around 20 years of age, who had finished his rhetorical studies at Carthage and was about to leave for his parents' home in Greece. Moreover, as the letters are written in late 410 or early 411,⁵² it is likely that Augustine had been informed about the sack of Rome and had witnessed a first wave of refugees arriving from Italy in Carthage. This is important because there were many pagans among these refugees, who were thus given a strong argument to blame Christianity and the neglect of the victorious gods of Rome for this recent military disaster. He was also continuously involved in the Donatist conflict. His writings at this time therefore are of a more polemical nature than his earlier works. He was po-

50 Aug. *conf.* 1.9.14; 1.12.19; 1.13.20–22. See Krämer (2007), 116–40 (literature); Gemeinhardt (2007), 375–9; Hunink (2009).

51 Aug. *conf.* 6.16.26.

52 R.B. Eno, in: Fitzgerald et al. (1999), 301.

lemical towards ancient philosophical traditions, although he was surely more concerned about writings by non-conformist Christians.

In the opening letter (117) Dioscorus expressed curiosity regarding certain interpretations of Cicero's dialogues, framing his interest as a desire not to appear uneducated in his home country. The letter does not contain the actual questions by Dioscorus, but from Augustine's answer, it is clear that they concerned Cicero's works *Orator*, *De oratore*, and *De natura deorum*.⁵³ The first two are rhetorical handbooks, the latter deals critically with pagan religion. There is no reason to think that these works were offensive to most Christians; on the contrary, in the age of Diocletian it had even been proposed to the senate to search out and destroy all extant copies of *De natura deorum* as if it were a Christian book.⁵⁴ Dioscorus, however, found it somewhat inappropriate to ask Augustine about the works of Cicero. This shows that he was nevertheless worried that his questions were religiously offensive.

In his reply (118), Augustine confirms Dioscorus' worries, explaining that the questions were inappropriate not just ideologically and theologically, but also because he had a very busy office as a bishop.⁵⁵ The repetition of his line of argument indicates Augustine's determination to hammer his point home into Dioscorus as if in a school lesson: if Dioscorus was concerned about truth rather than admiration by others, he argues, then it would be unnecessary "to know the diversity of opinions from those without", such as the dialogues of Cicero.⁵⁶ However, in order to subvert and destroy those previous falsities, errors, those childish, ridiculous, and superfluous things,⁵⁷ Augustine concedes that it can be helpful to know Cicero's dialogues. His use of polemical metaphors is intriguing as it demonstrates the range of terms that clerics employed to cast doubt on a text's worthiness. This knowledge, he suggests, can help a speaker to capture the attention of well-educated people and prepare them for conversion. However, he stresses, moral conduct is more important for this purpose – showing, rather than telling.⁵⁸ He goes on to note that knowledge of ancient philosophy can also be helpful in defending Christianity against pagans who seek to bring forward arguments against Christianity from the same source. But again, knowledge of and adherence to the truth of Christianity is also sufficient for this pur-

⁵³ Aug. ep. 118.5.34.

⁵⁴ See p. 30 above.

⁵⁵ Aug. ep. 118.1.2.

⁵⁶ Aug. ep. 118.2.8: *de diversitate cognoscenda sententiarum alienarum*; 2.11–12.

⁵⁷ Aug. ep. 118.2.8: *falsa*; 2.9: *errore, puerilium rerum*; 2.11: *ridiculum, superflua multa*; 2.12: *destruat falsitates, falsa ... subvertere*.

⁵⁸ Aug. ep. 118.2.11.

pose too.⁵⁹ There is less need now to acquire such rhetorical skills and philosophical knowledge than there was in the past, he suggests, certainly as far as discussions with pagans are concerned. As these discussions have died out, he expects Dioscorus is more likely to encounter non-conformist Christians in Greece: the Arians, Eunomians, Macedonians, Cataphrygians “and the other pests.”⁶⁰

While there is no record of Dioscorus’ initial inquiry, we can surmise the areas and topics that he proposed from Augustine’s reply which infers that he wanted to know about Cicero’s reception of ancient Greek philosophers, including pre-Socratics like Anaximenes, Anaxagoras and Democritus.⁶¹ Although Dioscorus, as a member of the upper strata of society, had visited the best rhetoric schools in Carthage, it is telling that he had so far not been able to learn about such areas and therefore needed to consult a Christian bishop, although it must be noted that Dioscorus likely asked Augustine for a letter in order to show off his social connections:⁶²

In Africa you are troubled by no questioner on these matters inasmuch as you cannot find anyone who would be troubled by you, and because of that dearth you are forced to send your questions to bishops for an explanation.

But for all Dioscorus assumes Augustine’s knowledge, Augustine bewails that he does not even have access to books by Cicero at his see:⁶³

⁵⁹ Aug. ep. 118.2.12; in 2.10 he mentions people in Greece, probably Neoplatonic philosophers, asking questions about ancient Greek philosophers.

⁶⁰ Aug. ep. 118.2.12; also: “However, if it is necessary, as I said, to know in advance some of the opinions opposed to the truth and to have thought these through, we need to think about the heretics who call themselves Christians rather than about Anaxagoras and Democritus.” (*tamen si opus est, ut dixi, veritati adversantes praenoscere aliquas et pertractatas habere sententias, de haereticis potius, qui se christianos vocant, quam de Anaxagora et Democrito nobis cogitandum fuit.*)

⁶¹ Aug. ep. 118.2.12.

⁶² Aug. ep. 118.2.9: *et in Africa usque adeo de his interrogatorem pateris neminem, ut nec te ipsum quis patiatur invenias eaque inopia episcopis exponenda ea mittere cogaris.* Also: “those professors of rhetoric at Carthage were of no help in this study of yours.”

⁶³ Aug. ep. 118.2.9: *cum in ipsa etiam scholari levitate et rhetoricis cathedris ita obmutuisse atque obtorpuisse videantur, ut a Carthagine Hipponem, quo exponi possint, mittenda existimentur, ubi tam insolita atque omnino peregrina sunt, ut, si vellem respondendi cura inspicere aliquid volens videre ... codicem prorsus invenire non possem.* Augustine mentions his church library also in letters 231.7 and 211.13 but not any of the classics; Koopmans (1949), ad locum, p. 134; Krämer (2007), 96.

For even in that scholarly lightness and in the chairs of rhetoric, they seem to have fallen silent and become numb to the point that people think that such questions should be sent from Carthage to Hippo in order to be explained. But here they are so unusual and utterly foreign that if I wanted to review a text in my concern to reply [...], I could not in fact find this book.

Echoing Jerome, Augustine explains that bishops have knowledge of pagan philosophy because of the education they received before conversion. As we have seen, canon law prohibited bishops to read pagan books, but (Augustine says) prior knowledge meant that bishops “tolerated them to remain in their memory”, even though “they would prefer to bury them in utter oblivion, when brought to mind.” This prior knowledge is evident as Augustine frequently borrows from Cicero in his works, perhaps from his memory.⁶⁴

Augustine admonishes Dioscorus to pay close attention to people who bring forward hidden ideas borrowed from certain ancient philosophers, because these are heretical ideas:⁶⁵

I beg you to see and hear whether anyone produces anything against us from Anaximenes and Anaxagoras, when not even the ashes of the much more recent and much more loquacious Stoics or Epicureans are warm enough that any spark can be struck out from them against the Christian faith.

In this passage, Augustine appears to be referring to the ashes of the Stoic and Epicureans as writings long lost, alluding to the natural death of their memory.⁶⁶ Similarly, in 386 or 387, concerning the pagan author Antiochus of Athens, who flourished at the end of the second century AD, Augustine wrote: “the evil thought from the ashes of the Stoics”,⁶⁷ while Jerome, on the other hand, employs the figure of the “spark” (*scintilla*) to refer to heretical authors, in the context of searches for books dealing with the beginnings of nature.⁶⁸ He advises

⁶⁴ Aug. ep. 118.2.9: *sibi in memoria durare paterentur ... ipsa oblivione sepelire mallent recordata*. And see Hagendahl (1967), 709–13; O'Donnell (2005), 126.

⁶⁵ Aug. ep. 118.2.12: *oro te, et vide atque ausculta, utrum aliquis adversus nos de Anaximene et de Anaxagora proferat aliquid, quando iam ne ipsorum quidem multo recentiorum multumque loquacium Stoicorum aut Epicureorum cineres caleant, unde aliqua contra fidem Christianam scintilla excitetur*.

⁶⁶ In ep. 164.2.4, Augustine writes about the lost literary remains of ancient philosophers which are known only in secondary quotations.

⁶⁷ Aug. c.Acad. 18.41: *nescio quid inferens mali de Stoicorum cineribus, quod Platonis adyta violaret*.

⁶⁸ Hier. ep. 127.10: *cementes heretici de parva scintilla maxima incendia concitari et suppositam dudum flammam iam ad culmina pervenisse*; and further on: “The method of condemning

Dioscorus, however, to conceal this knowledge in any other context,⁶⁹ further noting that the opinions of the natural philosopher Anaximenes have slept for ages, so there is no need to learn these because of “idle curiosity.” However, Augustine appears to be rhetorically downplaying their actual importance since the only reason to be acquainted with these opinions is to be able to refute adversaries. This implies that there was at least theoretical expectation that contemporary pagans could bring up these opinions as counter-arguments against Christianity, probably encouraged by recent resentments against Christianity after the fall of Rome. It is therefore telling that both Anaximenes and Anaxagoras were natural philosophers. Their ideas of substance and of the void, respectively, are the most likely to have served as arguments against Christianity at that time, although it is unlikely that original writings circulated; rather, much of the knowledge of these old philosophies in the West derived from Cicero.⁷⁰

Augustine assumes that the knowledge of these branches of ancient philosophy was practically lost in his age, distinguishing certain regions. While Rome and Carthage are the “two great cities, masters of Latin literature”, Augustine does not think that ancient philosophical studies are continued in either city: “both here, where you came to learn these matters, and in Rome you have experienced how insignificant they are considered and, for this reason, are neither taught nor learned.” Also, neither city will “annoy you with questions on these points nor care about your nuisances so they listen to your questions about them.” Augustine suggests that the same applies not only to Carthage but to Africa as a whole, noting that the intellectual climate was such that there is not even tolerance concerning persons who wish to learn about philosophy.⁷¹ To my mind, this shows that the rhetoricians he alludes to were largely Christianised by the early fifth century.

the heretics was such [...] that he brought in the scrolls ‘about the first beginnings’, which were shown to have been corrected by the hand of a scorpion” (*damnationis hereticorum haec fuit principium, ... dum inopia περὶ ἀρχῶν ingerit volumina, quae emendata manu scorpii monstrantur*): Koopmans (1949), ad locum, p. 147, with examples for the metaphorical use of “ashes”. An example for “ashes” actually referring to book-burning is *Ov. trist.* 5.12.61–8.

⁶⁹ *Aug. ep.* 118.3.13: “Whoever he may be who asks of you the questions you ask of us, let him hear that you are more learned and more wise in your not knowing them.”

⁷⁰ Especially, *Cic. nat. deor.* 1.24.

⁷¹ *Aug. ep.* 118.2.9: *hic, quo ad ea discenda venisti, et Romae expertus es, quam neglegenter habeantur et ob hoc neque doceantur neque discantur ... nec taedio tibi sint, ut a te ista perquirant, nec taedia tua curent, ut te ista perquirentem exaudiant ... duae tantae urbes Latinarum litterarum artifices.*

As to these gymnasia now, Augustine adds that Dioscorus “found them also bare as well and cold to such matters.”⁷² Augustine is referring to the gymnasia in Greece, Dioscorus’ home country. He may have been downplaying the interest in questions found in ancient natural philosophers: “I am surprised in a degree beyond all expression that you, a young man with such a good attitude, are worried that in Greek and Eastern cities you will have to endure any annoying questioner on these matters.”⁷³ Augustine here is exaggerating the position in order to manipulate Dioscorus. Earlier, in 386, Augustine had noted that philosophers were scarce then and if so these were Cynics, Peripatetics, or Platonists.⁷⁴ In Athens, however, philosophical debates continued as Neoplatonism had revived from the end of the fourth century onwards, something that Augustine acknowledges. His assumption in this exchange is that Dioscorus may still encounter people in Greece asking questions about Greek philosophy in their own Greek texts, rather than about “certain dismembered and dispersed particles of their teachings, in Latin dialogues.”⁷⁵ This line indicates that contemporary Greek philosophers regarded Cicero as an epigonic author rather than that they were not interested in pre-Socratic or other old philosophers.

Despite these stated reservations, the upshot is that after a becoming show of reluctance Augustine finally agreed to introduce Dioscorus to the basics of pagan philosophy. The questions Dioscorus asks, he compares to a “dangerous illness of the body”, which requires doctors and medicine. The best way to treat it was a course of the Christian truth in his studies.⁷⁶ This explains why some philosophical opinions as well as the books that contained these opinions are portrayed as diseases in Christian polemical texts. Augustine lays out the course both of treatment and of study: among the philosophical schools to discuss he lists the Stoics, the Epicureans and Platonists, whilst among the single authors to debate he notes Arcesilaus, Polemon, Xenocrates – school heads of the Platonic academy – and Pythagoras alongside those already mentioned.⁷⁷ By comparison, Platonism is clearly given credence for coming close to the core aspects of Christianity. Following this prescriptive course, Augustine approaches the subject by systematically dividing the respective tenets of each

⁷² Aug. *ep.* 118.2.9: *invenisti talibus rebus nuda atque frigida.*

⁷³ Aug. *ep.* 118.2.9: *miror tantum, quantum dici non potest, vereri te, tam boni ingenii iuvenem, ne in Graecis atque orientalibus urbibus quemquam de his rebus molestum interrogatorem feras.*

⁷⁴ Aug. *c.Acad.* 3.19.42.

⁷⁵ Aug. *ep.* 118.2.10: *dogmatum particulas quasdam discerptas atque dispersas in Latinis dialogis.*

⁷⁶ Aug. *ep.* 118.3.13.

⁷⁷ Aug. *ep.* 118.3.16; 4.23: Pythagoras.

school into the areas of ethics, physics, and dialectics.⁷⁸ We will shortly see that it is the area of physics that poses the most problematic differences to Christianity.

On the subject of ethics, Augustine polemicizes against materialism, which previously was popular for the masses in that “fleshly enjoyment” (*carnalis voluptas*) was given priority over the good of the soul, mentioning the Epicurean tradition.⁷⁹ He may have been informed not only by Lactantius (as we have seen), but also by Cicero who attests the popularity of a simplified version of Epicureanism among the population.⁸⁰ In context, Augustine defends the concept of creation out of nothing (3.15) against the thesis of Epicurean causation. He also noted that the Stoics too were wrong because they think that everything in the natural world is bodily, which weakens the good of the soul (3.15). Against these, he argues, Platonists supported the preference of the soul to the body, an idea which comes closer to Christian truth. Historically, he suggests, the Platonists had been less successful (compared to both the materialist philosophies and Christianity) because they lacked “the example of divine humility”, revealed only by Jesus: “Before that example all pride gives way, is broken, and dies in the mind of anyone, who is wildly arrogant.”⁸¹

As to the field of physics, Augustine argues that the materialism of non-Platonist philosophical schools is to be condemned as they attribute the origins of nature to atoms (Epicureans) or to the four elements like fire (Stoics). The masses of “foolish” people, he suggests, followed these doctrines as they are drawn to the body. He argues that the Stoics and the Epicureans, unlike Christians, have been unable to recognise immaterial wisdom as the creator of nature.⁸² Likewise, concerning dialectics, he ridicules the Epicureans and Stoics for regarding the senses, such as touch, smell, hearing, and sight, to various extents, as the source of comprehending truth, whereas the Platonists are endorsed for their suggesting truth to be eternal, unchangeable and to be perceived only by human reason.⁸³ According to Augustine, this controversy had continued through successive periods of time up to the Christian era, which is found, for instance, in the Acts of the Apostles, who had argued against these schools.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Aug. *ep.* 118.3.21: *de moribus sive de natura rerum sive de ratione investigandae veritatis*.

⁷⁹ Aug. *ep.* 118.14: *carnales voluptates*, 17: *voluptas corporis*.

⁸⁰ Cic. *Tusc.* 4.3.6.

⁸¹ Aug. *ep.* 118.3.17: *cui uni exemplo in cuiusvis animo ferociter adrogantis omnis superbia cedit et frangitur et emoritur*.

⁸² Aug. *ep.* 118.3.18.

⁸³ Aug. *ep.* 118.3.19.

⁸⁴ Aug. *ep.* 118.3.20: *Christiana aetas*, referring to Acts 17:16–34.

He goes on to say that besides the Stoics and Epicureans, there were also many and diverse other, less conspicuous schools continuing down to the Christian era, but the learned men among the Christians had fought against these.⁸⁵ Thus it is likely that Augustine was alluding to the first to early third centuries, when these philosophies were flourishing. Meanwhile, he suggests, these debates, and especially those by the Epicurean and Stoic schools, are suppressed:⁸⁶

We see that surely in our age they have fallen silent to the point that in the schools of rhetoric it is now hardly mentioned as much as what their opinions were about. These disputes, however, have been so completely eradicated and suppressed even in the most loquacious gymnasia of the Greeks that if any school of error now emerged against the truth, that is, against the Church of Christ, it would not dare to step forth for battle if it were not covered under the Christian name.

Unlike the earlier John Chrysostom (in the East), then, it is apparent that Augustine perceived ancient philosophies as not any more dangerous except when put forward by non-conformist Christians. This again illustrates that the opinions of materialist philosophers continued to be transmitted in the writings or oral culture of heretical groups rather than in the original writings (at least in the Western part of the Empire). It is also clear that Augustine expected Greek gymnasia as the most likely places where these opinions were still known and discussed. These opinions could easily have been passed on in notebooks owned by students. The only exception to the dearth of philosophical transmission of ideas again is the Neoplatonic school, which in order to survive in the Christian world, needed to adjust its doctrines to the Christians, from Augustine's eschatological standpoint:⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Aug. ep. 118.3.21: *multi atque multiplices ... usque in tempora Christiana.*

⁸⁶ Aug. ep. 118.3.21: *quos iam certe nostra aetate sic obmutuisse conspicimus, ut vix iam in scholis rhetorum commemoretur tantum, quae fuerint illorum sententiae, certamina tamen etiam de loquacissimis Graecorum gymnasiis eradicata atque compressa sint, ita ut, si qua nunc erroris secta contra veritatem, hoc est contra ecclesiam Christi emergerit, nisi nomine cooperata Christiano ad pugnandum prosilire non audeat.* Cf. ep. 118.5.32: "we see that now no error dares to lift up itself to gather around it crowds of uneducated people without seeking the veil of the Christian name." (*nullum iam errorem se audere extollere ad congregandas sibi turbas imperitorum, qui non Christiani nominis velamenta conquirat*).

⁸⁷ Aug. ep. 118.3.21: *ex quo intellegitur ipsos quoque Platonicae gentis philosophos paucis mutatis, quae Christiana inprobat disciplina, invictissimo uni regi Christo pias cervices oportere submittere et intellegere verbum Dei homine indutum, qui iussit et creditum est, quod illi vel proferre metuebant.*

From this it is understood that those philosophers of the Platonic kind, having changed a few things which Christian discipline rejects, needed to submit their necks piously to Christ, the one invincible king, and to understand that the word of God was clothed with a human being, who commanded and was believed, something that the Platonists feared even to state.

Far from being unanimously accepted, however, Augustine notes that this submission of Platonist thoughts to Christianity had actually resulted into a quarrel within this school under the chairmanship of Plotinus in third-century Rome: “some of them were corrupted by curiosity concerning the arts of magic, while others entered into his army, knowing that the Lord Jesus Christ bore the person of the immutable truth and wisdom, which they were trying to attain.”⁸⁸ Augustine here is alluding to Iamblichus, Plotinus’ student, who practised theurgy, rather than to Porphyry, who wrote against Christianity and whose books were ordered to be burnt. Throughout his works, then, it can be noted that Augustine had an ambiguous attitude towards Platonism, somewhat in common with other Christian authors. Sometimes he would stress the interchangeability of Platonism and Christianity, and sometimes he condemns this school.⁸⁹ Augustine also shares with other Christian authors the view that Plato came into contact with the Jewish tradition during his travel to Egypt.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, Augustine frequently deprecated philosophical schools outside of Platonism, and in accordance with other Christian authors he tends to label Christianity a “philosophy” or “the true philosophy.” In doing so, he usually employs the Latin term *sapientia* in a Christian understanding as opposed to much of ancient philosophy which he addresses in common derogatory terms, calling it a “false doctrine” or “error.” He notes, however, that he has been able to study a great many different philosophers.⁹¹ His attitude towards them, while displaying ambiguity in some areas, in others is quite rigid. Thus it is un-

88 Aug. *ep.* 118.5.33; similarly, Aug. *vera relig.* 4.7; cf. Aug. *civ.* 8.5 (CCSL 47:221): “If, therefore, Plato has said that the philosopher is an imitator, knower and lover of this God, and is blessed by participation in him, what need is there to browse the others? No one has come closer to us than the Platonists” (*si ergo Plato Dei huius imitatore cognitore amatorem dixit esse sapientem, cuius participatione sit beatus, quid opus est excutere ceteros? nulli nobis quam isti propius accesserunt*).

89 Fuhrer (1997); Stock (1996), 65–74. See Aug. *ord.* 1.11.32.

90 Aug. *civ.* 8.11; Aug. *doctr. christ.* 2.40.60.

91 Aug. *ep.* 120.1.6; Aug. *vera relig.* 4.8; Aug. *c. Julian.* 4.72 (PL 44:774); Aug. *civ.* 8.1 (CCSL 47:216): (*neque enim continuo verae sapientiae sunt amatores, quicumque appellantur philosophi*): *profecto ex omnibus, quorum sententias litteris nosse potuimus, eligendi sunt cum quibus non indigne quaestio ista tractetur*. Cf. Krämer (2007), 85–92, 178–92, 213; O’Donnell (2005), 74–6; Brown (1967), 101–14; Conybeare (2006), 107.

surprising that in his letter to Dioscorus, Augustine, derogatory about other schools,⁹² is most strident about denouncing Epicurean philosophy, and particularly their theories of ancient atomism:⁹³

Epicurus indeed posits in the very beginning of the world only atoms, that is, a certain matter so small that it cannot be divided or perceived either by sight or by touch. And he says that by the fortuitous clash of this matter countless celestial bodies, living beings, souls themselves, and the gods come into existence.

Although it is clear that Epicurus conflicted with Augustine's views because, according to the Gospel of John (1:1–2), the word of God rather than the atoms existed exclusively in the beginning of the world, his polemics against atomism are intense but not very specific here. The main thrust of his refutation is against Epicurean optics (4.30–31) and he cites divine providence as contradicting the fortuitous clash of atoms (4.31). He also connects materialist philosophy with sin and sexual indulgence: "There exists such a great blindness of minds because of the voracity of sins and the love of the flesh, that even their freaky opinions could waste the leisure of the learned in disputing them."⁹⁴

In *The Usefulness of Belief* (4.10), Augustine gives a more detailed explanation of why Epicurean atomism is fundamentally opposed to Christian faith. Augustine addresses this work to a former Manichaean friend whom he seeks to turn away from heresy. This again indicates the contiguity contemporary Manichaeans were felt to have with the Epicurean tradition. Why Augustine did not introduce these themes in his exchange with Dioscorus is not clear, but it is probable that he considered this knowledge to be unsuitable for Dioscorus on account of his youth and the relatively unset nature of his Christian faith. Augustine's argument is that we have to trust the authorities, much as we do in school, and that some texts, although initially difficult, repay the time and effort required to engage with them. In this latter context, Augustine sees "three kinds of error to which men are liable when they read."⁹⁵ The first kind of error is to accept as true what is written, even though the author himself was aware that it is false. He gives the description of afterlife in Vergil's *Aeneid* as an example.

⁹² Aug. ep. 118.4.23: Academicians, Cicero, 24: Anaxagoras, 27–9: Atomists.

⁹³ Aug. ep. 118.4.28: *Epicurus vero neque aliquid in principiis rerum ponit praeter atomos, id est corpuscula quaedam tam minuta, ut iam dividi nequeant neque sentiri aut visu aut tactu possint, quorum corpusculorum concursu fortuito et mundos innumerabiles et animantia et ipsas animas fieri dicit et deos.*

⁹⁴ Aug. ep. 118.5.32: *cum igitur tanta sit caecitas mentium per ingluviem peccatorum amoremque carnis, ut etiam ista sententiarum portenta otia doctorum contereere disputando potuerint.*

⁹⁵ Aug. util. cred. 4.10: *tria genera sunt erroris, quibus homines errant, cum aliquid legunt.*

The third kind of error is one that could actually serve to the reader's advantage as Augustine gives the example of someone who reads that Epicurus praised continence (in accordance with Christian morals) and wrongly assumes that Epicurus believed in virtue rather than in bodily joy as the Supreme Good (this means, for example, that excessive eating and drinking needs to be avoided because it can make people sick rather than because it is morally wrong). The second kind of error certainly is the most detrimental, according to Augustine:⁹⁶

if someone were to suppose it as true and to be believed that the soul consists of atoms and after death is dissolved into the same atoms and perishes, because Lucretius wrote it. For he is no less miserable if he is convinced in so great a matter that this error is true, however much Lucretius, whose books have deceived him, imagined that.

Augustine outlines that the doctrinal problem with ancient atomism here (as in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*) is that it weakens the likelihood of punishments in hell, which in turn serve as a deterrent to commit sin as causing these punishments. Augustine appears to be following the view of earlier apologists that if the soul consists of atoms which after death remain in the material world, then human bodies cannot enter the afterlife (heaven, purgatory or hell) nor be resurrected at the Second Coming of Christ. As we will see, Augustine's condemnation of Epicurean atomism is closer to Prudentius than to John Chrysostom, who saw the automatic movements of atoms as not in accordance with the power of the Holy Spirit as the all-mover and giver of life. In the next section I shall show that Augustine attributed to the demonical city of Babylon those philosophical opinions which contradicted the Bible in ways like these, arguing that therefore any books containing these traditions needed to be shunned.

4.4 The Eschatological Cities of Babylon and Jerusalem

The didactic letter to Dioscorus is not exceptional for the later Augustine. It is well known that Augustine was motivated to write the eschatological *City of God against the Pagans* (between c. 411 and 427) because he wanted to refute the views of contemporary pagans who were arguing against the domination of Christianity. The original inspiration for his *magnum opus* was the sack of

⁹⁶ Aug. util. cred. 4.10: *si quis, quia Lucretius animam ex atomis esse scribit eamque post mortem in easdem atomos solui atque interire, id verum ac sibi credendum arbitretur. nam et hic non minus miser est, si de re tanta id quod falsum est pro certo sibi persuasit, quamquam id Lucretius, cuius libris deceptus est, opinatus sit.*

Rome in 410. This event had strengthened the position of those who argued that the neglect of the old gods and the imperial religious policy against them had contributed to the military downfall of the empire. Augustine's main argument is that Rome rose to power because of divine providence rather than the pagan demons, thus preparing the dissemination of Christianity. The *City of God* arguably became the most important text next to the Bible in the Middle Ages and its attitudes and strategies with which it engaged with the pagan literary patrimony and particularly with materialist philosophies are therefore important.

While the *City of God* has often been read as an outstanding example of Christian scholarship engaging with and borrowing from Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophies, this section will show that Augustine was as intolerant of philosophical opinions disagreeing with the Bible as he was with regard to heretical literature, arguing that, given the importance of his work, his attitudes may have played a role in some texts surviving and others being lost as well as that they shaped later scholarly engagements with ancient philosophical traditions. Starting with his citation of Varro's division of Roman religion, this section will go on to discuss Augustine's polemics against materialist philosophies, their link to Roman religion and Augustine's attitudes towards censorship and book-burning.

Augustine draws on the authority of the famous ancient scholar Varro (116–27) to underpin his point that a number of literary genres are unworthy of preservation and should rather be removed and forgotten. Varro's works are lost today, but Augustine still had access to the work that he cites for this purpose (*Antiquitates rerum humanarum et divinarum*), the content of which is known principally due to the information provided by Christian authors, above all Augustine.⁹⁷ In making his point, Augustine refers to Varro's structuring of the genres of pagan theology (*genera theologiae*): these are designated the mythical (*mythicon*), the physical (*physicon*), and the civil (*civile*), which are attributed to the poets, the philosophers, and the populace respectively. As to physical theology, "concerning which the philosophers have left many books", Varro notes, diverse opinions had been discussed by the Stoics, the Pythagoreans, and the atomistic Epicureans. Augustine concedes the point that Varro had criticised poetry as fictitious, immoral, and unworthy of the gods and that he had had the physical kind (natural philosophy) "removed from the forum, however, that is,

⁹⁷ Aug. civ. 6.3. See Hagendahl (1967), 601–17.

from the people, but enclosed it behind the walls of the school.”⁹⁸ In endorsing Varro’s position, Augustine is clear, as he is in the letter to Dioscorus, that materialistic philosophical systems and their physical world views should have no place in Christian society, as he repeatedly implies throughout the *City of God*.

Book 18 of the *City of God* is a pertinent example for Augustine’s polemics against the old philosophers, whom he attributes to the sinful, demonical city of Babylon, which in the Bible is destroyed for its pride, while also acknowledging their tremendous influence on Roman society just a very few centuries ago. Thus, Augustine mentions the seven sages⁹⁹ and the first philosophers, such as the pre-Socratic Anaximander, Anaximenes, Xenophanes, and Pythagoras. They lived, Augustine alleges, “when the people of God were held captive in Babylon”, following Eusebius.¹⁰⁰ Augustine constructs a competition between pagan and Christian discourses, noting that by comparison with the beliefs of the philosophers, the predictions of the prophets concerning the gospel and the Church are true and that the writings of the prophets had allegedly been circulating already before the philosophers.¹⁰¹

Developing this thought, Augustine puts the rejection of the writings of the ancient philosophers alongside that of uncanonical biblical writings as contrary to the truth of canonical books in two separate paragraphs. As to canonical scripture (*scripturae canonicae*), Augustine admits there had been, and are still brought forward (*proferuntur*), other prophetic writings “but the purity of the canon has not admitted these works.” They are rejected as unauthentic especially when “in these anything is read that is even contrary to the faith of the canonical books.”¹⁰² Augustine goes on to say that the philosophers too produced diverse opinions contrary to the truth. As they were inspired by a desire for personal glory rather than devotion to God, Augustine argues, they are to be shunned. He gives the examples of this philosophic tendency to vainglory as the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Socratic Aristippus and Antisthenes. Because they existed as one of a series of competing discourses (whereas Augustine argues that the Bible’s strength and purity is that it offers only one), they belong to the “city of demon-worship.”¹⁰³ Like in the letter to Dioscorus, Augustine im-

98 Aug. civ. 6.5 (CCSL 47:171): *de quo multos libros philosophi reliquerunt ... removit tamen hoc genus a foro, id est a populis; scholis vero et parietibus clausit.*

99 Aug. civ. 18.24.

100 Aug. civ. 18.25 (CCSL 48:616): *quo captivus Dei populus in Babylonia tenebatur.*

101 Aug. civ. 18.27–37.

102 Aug. civ. 18.38 (CCSL 48:633, 634): *sed ea castitas canonis non recepit ... in quibus etiam contra fidem librorum canonicorum quaedam leguntur.*

103 Aug. civ. 18.41 (CCSL 48:636): *daemonicola civitate.*

plies that because the teachers and students now are Christians, the old philosophers had no place in the schools of rhetoric.¹⁰⁴

Finally, let our own authors, among whom the canon of sacred writings is effectively fixed and limited, be far from disagreeing with each other in any respect! It is therefore with good reason that not just a few babblers in controversial disputations in schools and gymnasia, but so great numbers of people, in the country and in the towns, learned and unlearned alike, did believe that God was speaking to them or through them, when they wrote these books. It was truly fitting that the authors themselves should be few in number [...] For among the multitude of philosophers who have left behind monuments of their teachings also in their literary efforts, no one will easily find any who agree in every respect.

While I have shown that the original texts of school-founders such as Epicurus were hardly studied after the third century, we have seen that the Epicurean and Stoic branches of philosophy were, by contrast, the most popular among the elites of the Roman Empire in the first centuries AD. Augustine refers to and condemns this popularity.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, the philosophers debated publicly in bands, each in favour of their own opinion, in the conspicuous and well-known Portico [the Stoics], in the gymnasia, in gardens, and in places public and private. Some asserted that there is only one world, others that there are innumerable worlds [Epicureans]; some said that this one world came into existence, others that it had no beginning; some that it will perish, others that it will exist forever; some said that it is driven by a divine mind, others by fortune and chance; some said that souls are immortal, others mortal; from those who thought the souls are immortal, some said that they passed into animals [Pythagoreans ...] Some said that we should always trust the senses of the body...

104 Aug. civ. 18.41 (CCSL 48:636): *denique auctores nostri, in quibus non frustra sacrarum litterarum figitur et terminatur canon, absit ut inter se aliqua ratione dissentiant. unde non inmerito, cum illa scriberent, eis Deum vel per eos locutum, non pauci in scholis atque gymnasiis litigiosis disputationibus garruli, sed in agris atque urbibus cum doctis atque indoctis tot tantique populi crediderunt. ipsi sane pauci esse debuerunt ... neque enim in multitudine philosophorum, qui labore etiam litterario monumenta suorum dogmatum reliquerunt, facile quis invenerit, inter quos cuncta quae sentire conveniant.*

105 Aug. civ. 18.41 (CCSL 48:636–7): *nempe palam in conspicua et notissima porticu, in gymnasiis, in hortulis, in locis publicis ac privatis catervatim pro sua quisque opinione certabant, alii adserentes unum, alii innumerales mundos; ipsum autem unum alii ortum esse, alii vero initium non habere; alii interitum, alii semper futurum; alii mente divina, alii fortuito et casibus agi; alii immortales esse animas, alii mortales; et qui immortales, alii revolvī in bestias ... alii sensibus corporis semper ... putantes esse credendum.*

This passage summarises the various points of conflict that existed between Christianity and the old philosophies, notably the origin, duration and size of the world, the interference of the divine with human beings, the nature of souls and the science of the senses (as represented, for example, in optics and acoustics). As can be seen, Augustine is inherently critical of the pagan Roman state of the past as it did not ban deviant philosophical teaching:¹⁰⁶

Have any people or senate, any power or public authority of the ungodly city, ever taken care to judge these and other of the nearly countless opinions of the philosophers, to approve and receive some, to reject and dismiss others?

To Augustine, Rome had therefore “rightly received the symbolic name of Babylon, for Babylon means confusion” and he positions all of the philosophers as belonging to the devil, the king of the city.¹⁰⁷ The reference to Babylon is both metaphorically loaded and polemically significant. In the biblical book of Genesis, God destroyed the tower of Babylon as a manifestation of human pride and ambition. Elsewhere, Augustine notes that Babylon had been punished in its pride (*superbia*), which was located in the tongue (*lingua*).¹⁰⁸ In a similar vein, Prudentius uses the metaphors of the tongue throughout his work, notably the *Romanus* hymn. This shows the agreement of leading Christian authors that Christianity had overcome the old philosophies of the Roman Empire, indicating that it was as intolerant of the views proposed by these philosophies as it was intolerant of heretical opinions.

While Augustine therefore clearly disapproves of materialist philosophies, it must of course also be noted that he was far from condemning ancient philosophy as a whole, but that he found those philosophical opinions to be useful that agreed with Christianity. For example, following the discourse above, Augustine argues that the philosophers had occasionally found some truths, but that in these instances they were inspired by God and therefore paved the way to Christianity. He gives a list of philosophical truths that thus agreed with Christianity: “that God made this world as a just world and that he himself administers it by his very providence, the nobility of virtue, the love of country, the fidelity in

106 Aug. civ. 18.41 (CCSL 48:637): *has et alias paene innumerabiles dissensiones philosophorum quis umquam populus, quis senatus, quae potestas vel dignitas publicae civitatis diiudicandas et alias probandas ac recipiendas, alias improbandas repudiandasque curavit.*

107 Aug. civ. 18.41 (CCSL 48:637): *non frustra talis civitas mysticum vocabulum Babylonis accepit. Babylon interpretatur quippe confusio*; cf. van Oort (1991), 118–23.

108 Aug. civ. 16.4 (CCSL 48:505); cf. Gen. 11:1–9.

friendship, good works and everything pertaining to decent morals.”¹⁰⁹ This list illustrates the range of subjects that actually were the most likely to be preserved and transmitted in Christian institutions.

Just like in his letter to Dioscorus and contemplating about the justification of heretics within God’s plan, however, Augustine perceives the danger threatening the Church of his days deriving not any more from the philosophers, attributed to Babylon, the city of confusion, but from non-conformist Christians:¹¹⁰

But the devil, seeing the temples of the demons deserted and humankind running to the name of the mediator who frees us, has moved the heretics, who under the Christian name resisted the Christian doctrine, as if these could be held indifferently in the City of God without any censure, just as the city of confusion indifferently held the philosophers who had diverse and mutually contradictory views. [...] For all the enemies of the Church, however blinded by error or depraved by maliciousness, exercise her patience if they receive the power of inflicting bodily harm; whereas if they oppose her only by their evil thoughts, they exercise her wisdom. Moreover, they exercise her benevolence, or even charity, so that she may show love even to her enemies, whether she deals with them by persuasive teaching or by terrible discipline.

Augustine, similarly to John Chrysostom, compares people with deviant philosophical opinions to persecutors while acknowledging that the counter-arguments by philosophers have shaped Christian theology and caused the specifically Christian kind of love shown to these enemies. To my mind, Augustine thinks that demons are causing these opinions and are therefore persecuting other human beings. This explains why book-burning was seen as a cure and as an act of charity because book-burning exorcised the demons. This passage also indicates that Augustine expected deviant philosophical opinions to be proposed by non-conformist Christians rather than pagans, but this does not neces-

109 Aug. civ. 18.41 (CCSL 48:637–8): *quod mundum iustum Deus fecerit eumque ipse providentissimus administret, de honestate virtutum, de amore patriae, de fide amicitiae, de bonis operibus atque omnibus ad mores probos pertinentibus rebus*; on friendship, White (1992).

110 Aug. civ. 18.51 (CCSL 48:648–9): *videns autem diabolus templa daemonum deseri et in nomen liberantis mediatoris currere genus humanum, haereticos movit, qui sub vocabulo christiano doctrinae resisterent christianae, quasi possent indifferenter sine ulla correptione haberi in civitate Dei, sicut civitas confusionis indifferenter habuit philosophos inter se diversa et adversa sentientes. ... inimici enim omnes ecclesiae, quolibet errore caecentur vel malitia depraventur, si accipiunt potestatem corporaliter affligendi, exercent eius patientiam; si tantummodo male sentiendo adversantur, exercent eius sapientiam; ut autem etiam inimici diligantur, exercent eius benevolentiam aut etiam beneficentiam, sive suadibili doctrina cum eis agatur sive terribili disciplina.*

sarily mean that he did not expect pagans to come up with such arguments, although they were fewer in number.

Within this discourse of distinguishing pro-Christian and anti-Christian philosophical opinions, Augustine endorses Plato for his condemnation of poetry so much that he even finds it respectable that M. Antistius Labeo (jurist of the Augustan age) ranked Plato among the demigods, although he notes that attributing divine honours to Plato is not in accordance with Christianity. Rather, he thinks that Plato is ultimately inferior to any faithful Christian (2.14). Other philosophical schools, however, are to be detested if they were not in accordance with Christianity, implying that their termination is a sign of divine providence.¹¹¹

These are the inventions of men who, endowed with the brightest intellects, tried to investigate by reason, as far as they could, what was hidden in the laws of nature, what should be desired and avoided in the field of morals, and what, in the rules of logic, can be derived by strict deduction or what was inconsequent or even erroneous. And some of them, when they were supported by God, did make certain great discoveries. But when impeded by their human nature, they were wrong, especially when the divine providence justly resisted their pride in order to demonstrate even by comparison with them that the path of piety ascends from humility to the highest regions.

In context, Augustine puts poetry (but not classical poetry as a whole) and ancient philosophy (except for Plato) alongside pagan cult practice. It is worth noting that his statement on investigations into natural laws is close to the wording of an imperial law interdicting such practices.¹¹² Augustine clearly alludes to Epicureanism because he directly inverts the rhetoric of a couple of lines by Lucretius, who wrote that people ascend to heaven if they understand that the divine is not the cause of bodily movements.¹¹³

Compounding his attitudes towards censorship with his views on non-Platonic philosophers, in another section Augustine puts the writings of non-Platonic philosophers on a level with Numa's books and also with certain other priestly

111 Aug. civ. 2.7 (CCSL 47:39–40): *...sed hominum inventa, qui utcumque conati sunt ingeniis acutissimis praediti ratiocinando vestigare, quid in rerum natura latitaret, quid in moribus adpendendum esset atque fugiendum, quid in ipsis ratiocinandi regulis certa conexione traheretur, aut quid non esset consequens vel etiam repugnaret. et quidam eorum quaedam magna, quantum divinitus adiuti sunt, invenerunt; quantum autem humanitus impediti sunt, erraverunt, maxime cum eorum superbiae iuste providentia divina resisteret, ut viam pietatis ab humilitate in superna surgentem etiam istorum comparatione monstraret.*

112 See p. 70 above.

113 Lucr. 1.70–71, 78–9: *...effringere ut arta | naturae primus portarum claustra cupiret | ...quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim | obteritur, nos exaequat victoria caelo.*

records accounting for the humanity of Capitoline gods. It is decisive that he argues that what these latter two groups have in common is that they were either actually burnt, or proposed to be burnt, by pagans, while insisting that the materialist philosophers who “have said that corporeal entities are the cause and beginning of nature” must give place to the Platonists “who have said that the true God is the author of nature.” Augustine therefore rules out the possibility that the world came into existence by the clash of atoms and instead favours divine creation as the origin of the world. The examples he gives of these materialist philosophers are Thales, Anaximenes, the Stoics, and Epicurus. Their opinions are considered, on various grounds, to be equally contrary to Christianity as the aforementioned records had been to the old religions and need to cease (*cedere*) as much as the mythical (poetry and theatre) and civil (temple) theologies. Within this context, Augustine again singles out Epicurean atomism as contradicting Christianity.¹¹⁴ This shows, I suggest, that Augustine was very close to proposing that non-Platonic philosophical books – if still circulating – should be burnt as much as he considered the accounts of Roman religion as worthy of destruction for the sake of Christianity and that his work could easily be understood in this way. In a similar vein it appears quite natural to him that certain authors of the past, such as Stoic philosophers, were now dwelling in hell, as if their bodies were punished for the *corpus* of literature they produced.¹¹⁵ While it must be noted that this does not necessarily mean that Christians actually burnt books following Augustine’s text, on balance it seems plausible that his text had a negative impact on the text transmission or future re-emergence of opinions related to these philosophies other than in the context of condemnation.

In summary, in the eschatological *City of God*, arguably the single most influential work in the West throughout the Middle Ages after the Bible,¹¹⁶ Augustine lays out his strong disapproval of much of pagan philosophy – with the exception of appropriated Platonism – as aligned with non-conformist Christian works or oral traditions. His treatment of Epicurean traditions in particular suggests that this tradition was not completely forgotten by well-educated Christians or by pagans. As in the letter to Dioscorus, he perceives these philosophies as dangerous because they continued to inform contemporary non-conformist Christians, but he also seems to imply that contemporary pagans too were still familiar with materialist discourses and therefore argued against Christianity. As the unity of Christianity is still under threat from these discourses, the city

¹¹⁴ Aug. civ. 8.5 (CCSL 47:221, 222): *Platonicis philosophis cedant, qui verum Deum et rerum auctorem ... esse dixerunt ... corpora, causam principiumque rerum esse dixerunt.*

¹¹⁵ Aug. civ. 19.9; cf. Aug. ep. 164.2.4; Brown (1967), 308.

¹¹⁶ See Van Oort (1991), 1–4 on the influence of this work.

of God thus represents an eschatological ideal state that Augustine feels is currently unrealised on earth. From this perspective, the *City of God* accords that certain philosophical tenets that contradict the Bible need to be censured in an ideal Christian society, while other (idealist) philosophical tenets, despite their pagan origin, can actually be helpful. It is, in Augustine's opinion, Epicurean natural philosophy that poses the most serious threats to core aspects of Christianity, such as creation, the nature of the soul, afterlife and the Second Coming of Christ. These views, while discussed already by early Christian authors, became prominent in the fourth and early fifth centuries. In the next section I will show that Augustine's contemporary Prudentius shared these views.

4.5 Prudentius and Epicurus

While Augustine's *City of God* represents the appropriation of philosophy in the service of religion, the work of Prudentius can be read as part of the Christian transformation of classical literary genres as well as outlining the reservations of some Christians against inheriting or preserving a specifically pagan literary heritage. Prudentius would have agreed with Paulinus of Nola, who noted that all Christian poetry needed to be purified of the Muses, and purged of its pagan content.¹¹⁷ Nowhere is this transformative process more prominently depicted by Prudentius than it is in his masterpiece, the *Psychomachia*. In the first battle scene the allegory of Paganism is smashed to the ground, just like an idol, her head trampled down by Faith. It depicts paganism, however, as far from being dead: "The passage to the throat is cut off, having been disconnected and squeezing the evil soul, while her long gasps distress her death, making it difficult."¹¹⁸

I have argued elsewhere that the long death of Paganism foregrounds that openly religious pagans existed into the early fifth century.¹¹⁹ In this scene, Paganism's head is dressed in "fillets" (*vittae*), which represent both priests in charge of sacrifices and poets.¹²⁰ Furthermore, Gnilka has noted a parallel between this and a passage in Lucretius, where Epicurus (who explained the world without the interference of gods) tramples on the head of religion.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Paul. Nol. *carm.* 10.19–22.

¹¹⁸ Prud. *psych.* 34–5: *animamque malignam | fracta intercepti commercia gutturis artant, | dif-
ficilemque obitum suspiria longa fatigant.*

¹¹⁹ Rohmann (2003).

¹²⁰ See Stat. *Ach.* 1.11; Mastrangelo (2008), 24–5 on a discussion.

¹²¹ Lucr. 1.62–79; Gnilka (1979), 158–9.



Figure 2. Indersdorf monastery (Bavaria), ceiling fresco, scene from the life of St Augustine, 1755 by Matthias Günther. Augustine hurling lightning bolts, which strike the books and physical instruments of the false teachers, who fall into an abyss; next to Augustine the allegory of the Church, beneath the allegories of Europe, Africa and Asia. Photo: The Warburg Institute, with kind permission of the Indersdorf parish, photographed by Berthold Kress

From this perspective, it appears that Prudentius was thinking of pagan groups who had been silenced in retaliation, although in a metaphorical picture. Augustine employed a similar metaphor in his *Confessions* where he notes his regret that his early writings (more sympathetic with his education in the classics and ancient philosophies) had “still exhaled the school of pride as if in deadlock.”¹²² He was probably alluding to his previous endorsement of Epicureanism. To my mind, it is decisive that by the end of the poem *sapientia* (Christian wisdom) rules over the temple of man’s soul, holding a sceptre prefigured by Aaron’s staff. This image originated in the Book of Exodus (7:8–13) where Moses used the staff to swallow the serpents summoned by the wise men and magicians in Egypt. Symbolically, it is chosen to show how Christianity had overcome ancient wisdom. In this section I shall therefore argue that Prudentius was in many ways close to Augustine especially in his polemical sections that engaged with traditions from materialist philosophies and that, while it can perhaps not be proven who was building on whom, a certain amount of intertextuality between the two authors appears to be likely.

As I have said before, it is extremely unlikely that there were Stoics or Epicureans left by that time in the sense of a culture or community, but it is likely that some of the tenets of these once influential schools were extant, for example, in astrological or heretical writings, in handbooks, notebooks or in oral tradition. It is also likely these ideas had a lingering influence. After all, we have seen that contemporary senators like Praetextatus and Nicomachus Flavianus were interested in natural philosophy and in Epicurus, and Prudentius may sometimes be alluding to this influence.

Even Prudentius himself can be positioned as an example of this ongoing transmission. That he was trained in rhetoric cannot only be deduced from his frequent imitation of classical lines, such as from Vergil, Ovid, and Horace, but is also evidenced from the preface to the *Cathemerinon*. Prudentius complains about his education in rhetoric and jurisprudence that had taught him to utter sins.¹²³ It has been established long ago that this otherwise Christian poet appropriated verse material from the Epicurean poem *De rerum natura* by Lucretius.¹²⁴ It is intriguing that he does so primarily in his two apologetic poems against heresy, the *Apotheosis* and the *Hamartigenia*. Both poems con-

¹²² Aug. *conf.* 9.4: *adhuc superbiae scholam tamquam in pausatione anhelantibus*.

¹²³ Prud. *praef.* 7–12; cf. Aug. *in evang. Ioh.* 2.14. In *perist.* 9, Prudentius narrates the example of the martyr Cassian, who was detained as a Christian teacher and stabbed to death by the pens of his pupils, whom he mistreated. Perhaps Prudentius had bad memories about his own education.

¹²⁴ Brakman (1920).

demn Epicurean traditions. The *Apotheosis* defends the orthodox assumption of creation out of nothing (*Apoth.* 782ff.), which contradicted the Epicurean concept of causation (nothing can be produced from nothing). In this, Prudentius specifically polemicizes against Manichaeism (*Apoth.* 952–8) in order to defend the incarnation of Jesus despite the Manichaean counter-argument that matter is imperfect. In this context, Prudentius mentions the “shadow of an abstruse doctrine, which is informed by [the theory of] fine atoms with a minute structure.”¹²⁵ While he could be referring only to the flimsiness of Manichaean doctrines, its wording and sentiment aligns it to the claims of other Christian authors that Manichaeans borrowed elements from Epicurean atomism.

Similarly, the *Origin of Sin* (*Hamartigenia*) polemicizes against Epicurean teaching, while using spoils from Lucretius. In summary, the poem as a whole is written against Marcion (pr. 36), who as we have seen was charged with having borrowed some aspects from Epicurean philosophy. In its main section, Prudentius explains that all things, including the devil (as a fallen angel) but excepting God, true wisdom (164: *sapientia vera*) and the Holy Spirit, are from nothing (162–4: *ex nihilo*). He also introduces a polemical discourse on the Epicurean notion of joy (252, 314: *voluptas*) and the related concepts of *libido* (253, 305) and of indulgence (282, 298: *luxus*). In this work, Prudentius argues that current earthquakes, natural disasters and invasions are caused by sin (236–43, 492–505), that is the affinity of contemporaries to *voluptas* (244–345, 506–620), rather than by natural phenomena of the material world, a view represented by Lucretius. I therefore agree with Dykes’ reading of the poem as appealing to the responsibility of the reader to accept that his sins affect the cosmic order.¹²⁶

These motifs are mirrored in another work by Prudentius, book two of *Contra Symmachum*. Using a fictitious speech of the emperors Valentinian and Gratian, Prudentius states Symmachus’ famous quotation: “We cannot attain to so great a mystery by one way alone.”¹²⁷ With this line, the pagan senator Symmachus wanted to persuade the emperors to be tolerant in religious matters and not to privilege Christianity only but to allow different ways of religious cult practice.

In presenting counter-arguments to Symmachus’ plea to allow a multitude of ways in worship (90), Prudentius warns against belief in natural philosophy, arguing that God has power over his creation and is therefore able to cause the end of the world: “Poor mortals, let not the teachings of the natural philosophers de-

125 Prud. *apoth.* 952–4: *...nebulosi dogmatis umbram | prodere, quam tenues atomi conpage minuta | instituunt.*

126 Dykes (2011).

127 Symm. *rel.* 3.10: *uno itinere non potest perveniri ad tam grande secretum.*

ceive you!”¹²⁸ The line also appears to be an indirect allusion to the pagan notion of the independent movement of elements, posited by natural philosophers, as Prudentius indicates a few lines further below.¹²⁹ It specifically appears to be arguing against Epicureanism, noting that bodily joy (*voluptas*) needs to be overcome by Christian values (146). Prudentius aligns Symmachus’ pagan position with the Epicurean belief in joy as the highest good, based on the view that there is no afterlife and that the movement of inanimate objects in the world are directed by no god.¹³⁰

This whole section is paralleled in the preface to the *Apotheosis*: the wrong way of philosophy (16: *iter devium*) actually lead men to stray from the way of salvation (5: *via*). In this, a band of enemies has prepared manifold ways to drag people into hell by fooling them into accepting *libido* (5–17). This again illustrates the wicked nature of the demons which inspire philosophical opinions contrary to the Bible in order to produce sexual urges in human beings and thus to bar them from salvation.

In sum, we have seen that both Prudentius and Augustine continued to argue against materialist philosophy, particularly against Epicureanism in the early fifth century and that it is therefore likely that they perceived Epicurean traditions as a continuous threat to the unity of the Church. However, both authors perceived these old philosophies as hardly dangerous any more except when put forward by non-conformist Christians, although within the works of both authors there seems to be a certain expectation that Epicurean ideas continued to circulate among pagans in writing or oral culture. In the next section, I shall argue that two polemical authors from the Greek East in the late fourth and early fifth centuries display similar attitudes in this regard.

4.6 Polemics against Materialist Philosophies in the East

For the purpose of this chapter, it is particularly interesting to track down John Chrysostom’s attacks on the materialistic, Stoic and Epicurean, philosophies in order to determine whether these schools had been entirely forgotten or were still received by John’s contemporaries. It is well-established that Christian authors frequently engaged with, and borrowed from, ancient philosophical schools, such as from the Stoics and even the Epicureans. It is therefore not sur-

¹²⁸ Prud. *c.Symm.* 2.203: *nil vos, o miseri, physiconum dogmata fallant.*

¹²⁹ Prud. *c.Symm.* 2.227: *unus ego [Deus] elementa rego.*

¹³⁰ Prud. *c.Symm.* 2.220–26.

prising that alongside many other Christian authors, John in his sermons and treatises engages with them as being in conflict with Christianity. Examining John's polemical discourse against philosophical schools will help us understand the reasons why Christian clerics wanted to ban certain philosophical texts as obstacles to salvation because of their link to demonic possession. The main reason given in the source material is the deviation of these discourses from the Bible on points of natural philosophy. For example, John criticised the Stoic interpretation of the world as "body and fire" while at the same time suggesting that the influence of the Stoics had now declined. He suggests that, at the time of writing, even ordinary uneducated men were sure that the world had been created by God.¹³¹

I have shown that the Epicureans, popular during the imperial period, were also vehemently attacked by Christian authors. In a *Homily on the Acts of the Apostles* (related to Acts 17:16–33), John argues against both schools. I have already discussed the passage from the Acts of the Apostles in section 3.1, but John adds many further interpretations to this passage. He writes that when Paul came to Athens he found it "a city full of idols" and "a city of talkers."¹³² This is in line with the usual derogatory description of philosophers as babblers. John's text suggests that it was while Paul was preaching in the marketplace that he came across Stoic and Epicurean philosophers, whom John describes as "children" debating "children's fancies [and the] ravings of drunken men."¹³³ Threatened by Paul's teachings, it proposes that some of these men charged him with introducing foreign demons to the city and brought him to the Areopagus, where in classical times trials for murder were held, in order to scare him.¹³⁴ But in his speech there, John argues that Paul "overturned all the doctrines of the philosophers. For the Epicureans say that the movements of the universe have a mechanical nature and are conjoined with atoms."¹³⁵

To John, then, the scientific "hypotheses"¹³⁶ of these philosophies were incompatible with the existence of God. To John, God makes up the universe and everything that is therein, a completeness of creation that excludes partial

¹³¹ Chrys. *hom. 38 in Ac. 2* (PG 60:270).

¹³² Acts 17:16; Chrys. *hom. 38 in Ac. 1* (PG 60:267–8).

¹³³ Chrys. *hom. 38 in Ac. 2, 4* (PG 60:271, 273): ταῦτα δὲ παίδων εὐρήματα, καὶ μεθύοντων ἀνθρώπων ἔστιν.

¹³⁴ Chrys. *hom. 38 in Ac. 1* (PG 60:268); cf. Chrys. *hom. 38 in Ac. 2* (PG 60:270): καταπλήζοντες.

¹³⁵ Chrys. *hom. 38 in Ac. 2* (PG 60:270): πάντα κατέστρεψε τὰ τῶν φιλοσόφων. οἱ μὲν γὰρ Ἐπικούρειοι αὐτόματά φασιν εἶναι τὰ πάντα, καὶ ἀπὸ ἀτόμων συνεστάναι.

¹³⁶ Chrys. *hom. 38 in Ac. 2* (PG 60:270): ὑποτιθέντες.

entities such as the atoms of Epicureanism. As God is both the creator (*poietés*) and the lord (*kýrios*) he creates all and everything in the world, including its movements and energies. John's reading of this is derived from Paul's speech in the Acts: "he gives to all life and breath" – a notion of the Holy Spirit as the "lord and giver of life" that was included in the Nicene Creed.¹³⁷ The world and all therein is the "work of God." Such a position contradicts the received wisdom of Epicurean philosophy as it perceives the natural laws that cause mechanical movements as demons: "His argument is an accusation against the atoms and against matter. He then proved that it is not partial. [...] He said that God himself is the creator of heaven and earth, surely not the partial demons."¹³⁸ John's teleological proof of God's existence establishes that atoms cannot exist as partial, uncreated entities: "If he is God, then clearly he made all; but if he made not, he is not God. Gods that made not heaven and earth, he said, let them perish."¹³⁹

So much did John adhere to physical explanations given in the Bible that, against ancient models of the world, he claimed the earth to float flat on the water, and argued that God caused the changes of seasons in order to produce new seeds, and organized the length of daylight to fit into the human works that depend on warm weather.¹⁴⁰ Referring to the authority of the prophets, John interprets the fact that the earth did neither sink nor dissolve in the water despite its heavy weight as a further proof for the power of God.¹⁴¹

At the end of this sermon, John again warns of the dangers of philosophical arguments against creation and Judgment Day, noting that the auditors should diligently search for any sin committed.¹⁴² He draws on the example of a child that had lost its voice in a fever attack but whose speech afterwards was miraculously healed by God.¹⁴³ It is intriguing to interpret the child as a simile to the philosophers, who are sometimes named children in John. He then compares the

¹³⁷ Chrys. *hom. 38 in Ac. 2* (PG 60:270): διδούς, φησί, ζωὴν καὶ πνοήν. John quotes Acts 17:25.

¹³⁸ Chrys. *hom. 38 in Ac. 2* (PG 60:271): κατηγορία τῶν τε ἀτόμων καὶ τῆς ὕλης, ἐνταῦθα δείκνυσιν, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι μερικὴ ... οὗτος, φησὶν, οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς Κύριος, οὐκοῦν οὐχ οἱ μερικοὶ δαίμονες.

¹³⁹ Chrys. *hom. 38 in Ac. 2* (PG 60:271): εἰ Θεός, πάντα ἐποίησε δηλόνوتي· εἰ δὲ μὴ ἐποίησεν, οὐ Θεός. Θεοί, οἱ τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν, φησὶν, οὐκ ἐποίησαν, ἀπολέσθωσαν. Referring to Jer. 10:11.

¹⁴⁰ See Chrys. *hom. 75 in Mt. 4* (PG 58:691), *hom. 81 in Mt. 5* (PG 58:737); *hom. 14 in Heb. 1* (PG 63:111) with Brändle (1997), 441; *stat. 9.3–4* (PG 49:107–9); similarly, Ath. *gent. 1.27, 3.36*. Lact. *inst. 3.24* too believed in a flat earth.

¹⁴¹ Chrys. *stat. 9.3* (PG 49:106–8).

¹⁴² Chrys. *hom. 38 in Ac. 4* (PG 60:273).

¹⁴³ Chrys. *hom. 38 in Ac. 5* (PG 60:274).

child's miracle-healing to the magic trials in Antioch, where books of "magic" were searched out and burnt. The dangers of possessing or hiding incriminating books is highlighted in this passage as John notes that he himself scarcely escaped the death penalty after he had found such an incriminating book.¹⁴⁴

John attacks Epicurean teaching on occasion throughout his work, at times descending into profanities to describe them. For example, he describes their philosophy as "the atheistic error of the Epicureans", their representatives as "teachers of error", attesting that there have been many and linking them to heresy.¹⁴⁵ The Epicurean notion of the soul consisting of matter is said to be a belief caused by the devil and he repeatedly calls it a "blasphemy."¹⁴⁶ Moreover, John considers someone who trusts exclusively in reasoning as a "natural man", "which is a sign of folly." By contrast, the soul of a Christian "has creation instead of a book set before her in open view." John, then, specifically places himself in opposition to the Epicurean doctrine that nothing can be produced from nothing, known best today from Lucretius' Latin didactic poem *De rerum natura*.¹⁴⁷ It is worth noting that many early Greek philosophers had endorsed this view, although it was challenged by the Platonic and Aristotelian schools.¹⁴⁸

John's argument against this doctrine, which implies that there is a scientific explanation for every physical phenomenon is that the devil has moved humankind to believe in this causal explanation rather than to recognise God as the creator of all things from the beauty of creation. In John's view, this doctrine had created countless heresies.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, this principle is linked to the fall of Eve in paradise, who trusted the devil-snake telling her "you will be like gods" if you eat from the tree of knowledge. This concept of causation, John proposes, was later communicated "through the rotten mouth of the Manichaeans, and it invented the gods of the Greeks based on the disease of this hypothesis."¹⁵⁰ This reading is important as it shows that John felt that Manichaeans had to some extent adopted the Epicurean principle of causation. Thus in adhering to the principle that "God made the things which are, out of

¹⁴⁴ Chrys. *hom.* 38 in *Ac.* 5: βιβλία γοητικά καὶ μαγικά. See section 2.1 above.

¹⁴⁵ Chrys. in *incarnationem Domini* 4 (PG 59:694): ἡ ἄθεος τῶν Ἐπικούρων πλάνη ... πολλοὶ γίνονται τῆς πλάνης διδάσκαλοι.

¹⁴⁶ Chrys. *hom.* 2 in *Ac.* 4–5 (PG 60:31–2).

¹⁴⁷ Chrys. *hom.* 7 in 1 *Cor.* 4 (PG 61:60): ψυχικός ... ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἀνοίας ... ἀλλ' εἶχε τὴν κτίσιν ἀντὶ βιβλίου προκειμένην ἐν μέσῳ; Lucr. 1.149ff.; on the term ψυχικός, Pearson (1973).

¹⁴⁸ See Sorabij (1983), 145f. with note 65.

¹⁴⁹ Chrys. *hom.* 7 in 1 *Cor.* 4 (PG 61:60): ὅθεν καὶ μυρίας ἔτεκον αἰρέσεις.

¹⁵⁰ Chrys. *hom.* 7 in 1 *Cor.* 5 (PG 61:61): διὰ τοῦ σεσηπότος τῶν Μανιχαίων στόματος· καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς τοὺς παρ' Ἑλλήσιν ἀπὸ τούτου τοῦ νοσήματος τῆς ὑποθέσεως ἀνέπλασε.

things which are not” John places himself and Christianity in diametric opposition to those concepts.¹⁵¹

Despite their obvious differences, there is indeed reason to believe that Christian theologians perceived Manichaeism to be influenced by a number of old philosophies. No Manichaean text has been preserved in a library, but some Manichaean books have been discovered as chance finds and their teaching can also be reconstructed from the refutations of their adversaries. Noteworthy points of confluence are the Epicurean belief in uncreated matter, the Pythagorean notion of the transmigration of souls and the Stoic belief in elements such as wind, light, water, fire and air. Another major point of conflict between Christianity and Manichaeism is their belief that God is outside the world, that his act of creation is partial work.¹⁵² This also implies an astrological system in which the movements of the stars and the zodiac signs indicate future events.¹⁵³

It is exactly the Epicurean, Stoic and Pythagorean philosophies that John ridicules elsewhere. In the first instance he notes “they who introduced destiny, and say that the universe is not the work of providence and that there is no one to care for anything, but that it consists of atoms.” In the second, he alludes to Stoics as “others again who say that God is a body” and to Pythagoreans as “those who make the souls of men the souls of dogs.” He returns to his particular refrain of calling the Greeks “children”,¹⁵⁴ arguing that Christians should not only laugh at these things but all of the other aspects of pre-Christian philosophy and society that are deserving of ridicule while seeing to it that “if anyone of our friends is fallen into the hands of the enemy, we shall burst his bonds apart, we shall strip him off this most painful and ridiculous prison.”¹⁵⁵ The link between Epicureanism and destiny shows that it could be argued that Epicurean philos-

151 Chrys. *hom. 22 in Heb.* 1 (PG 63:154): ὅτι ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων τὰ ὄντα ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεός, related to Heb. 11:1–3.

152 These various views can perhaps be best appreciated in the fourth-century *Acta Archelai* 25–31. This text has been edited by Vermes (2000) and a translation is found in Gardner and Lieu (2004), 182–7. It is a polemical but informative piece. Its narrative on creation is confirmed in *A Manichaean Psalm-Book. Part II*, ed. Allberry, 9.3–11.32 = Gardner and Lieu (2004), 176–9.

153 See *Kephalaia* (ed. Böhlig and Polotsky), no. 69, 166.31–169.22, translation in Gardner and Lieu (2004), 205–8.

154 Chrys. *hom. 12 in Ephes.* 3 (PG 62:91–2): οἱ τὴν εἰμαρμένην ἐπεισάγοντες, καὶ ἀπρονόητα εἶναι λέγοντες τὰ πάντα, καὶ μηδενὶ μέλιν μηδενός, ἀλλ’ ἐξ ατόμων συνεστάναι; ἀλλ’ ἔτεροι οἱ σῶμα τὸν Θεὸν εἰπόντες; ἀλλὰ τίνες, εἰπέ μοι; οἱ τὰς ἀνθρωπίνας ψυχὰς κυνείας ποιοῦντες.

155 Chrys. *hom. 12 in Ephes.* 3 (PG 62:92): εἴ τις ἡμῖν τῶν φίλων ἐάλωκε, διαρρήξωμεν αὐτοῦ τὰ δεσμά, ἀποδύσωμεν αὐτὸν τῆς χαλεπωτάτης καὶ καταγελάστου ταύτης εἰρκτῆς.

ophy was linked to illegal, demonical prophecies about destiny, that is the Epicurean notion of physical determinism. Moreover, John's encouragement to rescue captive friends can be seen as an exhortation to denounce to secular or clerical authorities people that did believe in Epicurean opinions. Laughter and compassion both act as weapons to cast doubt on a text's worthiness in a destructive way. In other words, John regarded the view that the universe consists of atoms that are moving automatically as a deliberate strategy of the devil, with which to deny salvation. Just like the allegory of paganism in Prudentius was trapped in her own body, so too were human beings believing in this destined to remain in their prison and barred from entering heaven.

John's *Homily on the Letter to the Thessalonians* indicates that contemporary pagans continued to borrow from Epicurean atomism to argue against the actuality of resurrection. The philosophical counter-argument is that those who were dissolved and had rotten away may not be restored to their former shape.¹⁵⁶ This dialectic on the resurrection is covered in detail by chapters of the two last books of Augustine's *City of God*, which refute similar arguments that were probably put forward by contemporary pagans. John instructs his audience in how to deal with persons raising such questions, particularly "Greeks" but also "heretics."¹⁵⁷ He advises ridiculing other ideas on the fate of the soul, such as the Pythagorean notion of metempsychosis, and to refrain entirely from discussing Epicurean opinions: "Others introduce atoms. With them, however, we have no argument at all."¹⁵⁸ This line indicates that John was still concerned about Epicurean traditions and that he thought his audience could be involved in discussions with heretical or pagan groups who borrowed from Epicurean ideas.

In his treatise *Demonstration against the Jews and Pagans* John goes on to attack philosophical schools such as Epicureans and Stoics, again pointing to ongoing debates between Christian and non-Christian philosophies. This passage is interesting as it provides a catalogue of topics that severely disagreed with the Bible:¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Chrys. *hom. 7 in 1 Thess. 2* (PG 62:436). Cf. Aug. *civ. 22.12*.

¹⁵⁷ Chrys. *hom. 7 in 1 Thess. 1–2* (PG 62:435–6).

¹⁵⁸ Chrys. *hom. 7 in 1 Thess. 2* (PG 62:437): ἕτεροι ἀτόμους εἰσάγουσιν. ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἐκείνους οὐδεὶς ἡμῖν λόγος.

¹⁵⁹ Chrys. *Jud. et gent. 11.7* (PG 48:828): καὶ ὅμως τινὲς τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἰσὶν οἱ μὲν αὐτόματα πάντα λέγοντες, οἱ δὲ ἀγέννητα τὰ ὀρώμενα, οἱ δὲ δαίμοσιν ἐπιγράφοντες τὴν τούτων δημιουργίαν καὶ πρόνοιαν, ἄλλοι τύχῃ καὶ εἰμαρμένῃ, καὶ γενέσει, καὶ ἁστρων περιφοραῖς.

Nevertheless, there are some human beings saying that the universe consists of automatic movements, that visible objects are without beginning, and attributing creation and providence to a demon, others to fortune, fate, evolution, and the circling of the stars.

Sorabij regarded as a fundamental difference between pagan philosophies and early Christian views that most pagan philosophers denied that the universe had a beginning that was caused by God, although Platonism allowed creation and was therefore closer to the Christian view than other schools.¹⁶⁰ John goes on to say that people with ideas, such as those quoted above, suffer from the infection of a very serious disease,¹⁶¹ suggesting that Christianity has now replaced the ancient tradition:¹⁶²

Consider how great it is that everything under the sun has been filled with churches in such a short time, so many nations and people have been converted, the tradition of the forefathers has been destroyed, the deep rooted custom has been torn out, the tyranny of joy, the force of evil driven out like ashes, the altars, temples, idols, mysteries, the accursed festivals, and impure sacrifices have been obliterated just like smoke.

But he also acknowledges that Christianisation has been a difficult process. Alluding to the pervasive human reality of sexuality as well as Epicurean hedonism, he refers to joy/pleasure (*hedoné*) as an obstacle to Christianity and the philosophical literary tradition that precedes it:¹⁶³

For it did not only oppose tradition, but it also subdued joy, two tyrannical factors. For people were persuaded to despise what in many years they had received from their fathers, grandfathers, great grandfathers, their ancestors, their philosophers and rhetoricians.

Emphasising the theme, John again returns to the persecution and repression suffered by Christians and the Christian faith in the past. In this he was probably alluding to the book-burning and ideological attacks the faith bore during the Great Persecution under Diocletian. While the primary meaning appears to be

¹⁶⁰ Sorabij (1983), 193–4, 201.

¹⁶¹ Chrys. *Jud. et gent.* 11.7 (PG 48:828).

¹⁶² Chrys. *Jud. et gent.* 11 (PG 48:829–30; 12.3 Harkins): καὶ ἐννόησον ἡλίκον ἐστὶ τὴν ὑφ' ἡλίῳ κεμένην ἅπασαν Ἑκαλησιῶν ἐν χρόνῳ βραχεὶ τοσούτων ἐμπλήσαι, ἔθνη μεταθεῖναι τοσαῦτα, μεταπεῖσαι δῆμους, ἔθνη καταλῦσαι πατρῴα, συνήθειαν ἐρύζωμένην ἀνασπᾶσαι, ἡδονῆς τυραννίδα, κακίας ἰσχὺν ὥσπερ κόνιν ἀπελάσαι, καὶ βωμοὺς καὶ ναοὺς καὶ ξόανα καὶ τελετάς, καὶ τὰς ἐναγεῖς ἐορτάς, καὶ τὴν ἀκάθαρτον κνίσσαν ὥσπερ καπνὸν τινα ἀφανίσαι.

¹⁶³ Chrys. *Jud. et gent.* 12.6 (PG 48:830): οὐ γὰρ συνηθεῖα μόνον ἡναιτιοῦτο, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡδονὴν κατεῖχε, δύο τυραννικά πράγματα. ἃ γὰρ ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἐτῶν παρὰ πατέρων καὶ πάππων καὶ ἐπιπάππων καὶ τῶν ἀνωτέρω προγόνων, καὶ φιλοσόφων καὶ ῥητόρων ἦσαν παρειληφότες, ταῦτα ἐπείθοντο ἀποπτύειν.

that the message of the gospel and the power of the faith has weathered this and then torn apart its antagonists, there is perhaps a more literal meaning to this reading of destructions, that is an allusion to give up some readings as a consequence of conversion or even to the burning of books authored by Porphyry.¹⁶⁴

And even though the tyrants prepared war against the Church, the soldiers attacked it, the people raged more vehemently than fire, tradition opposed it, the rhetoricians, the sophists, the rich, the unlearned and the rulers stood up against it, yet the Word overtook and destroyed these thorns more vehemently than fire, purified the fields and sowed the word of preaching.

Addressing his uneducated audience, John frames it as though all emperors before Constantine were not only pagan but attacked the Church to some extents. In a word, he holds the old philosophies responsible for their underpinning the religious conflicts and persecutions of the past.

To summarise thus far, John does give several clear reasons why Christians should not engage with certain pagan traditions. With the possible exception of Plato, he argues that this is because most of pagan philosophy was in opposition to Christianity's true philosophy, and studying it would lead to deviance from the word of God. Natural philosophy, or ancient science, in particular contradicted biblical teaching in a way that John found insupportable. For example, certain philosophers preferred evolutionary ideas to the concept of creation out of nothing, and they argued for the primacy of natural laws and atoms against God as omnipotent and omnipresent.

Even in the early fifth century there was apparently some awareness that materialist philosophies were not forgotten in religiously diverse cities like Antioch and Alexandria. Thus in his treatise *Contra Julianum* Cyril of Alexandria proposes to quote and to discuss individual opinions (*dóchai*) found in the works of Greek philosophers in order to demonstrate their inferiority to Moses' writing.¹⁶⁵ He adduces these opinions through the secondary reference of Plutarch, probably because of a lack of original writings. He denounces Pythagoras, Thales, Democritus, Epicurus, his disciple Metrodorus, Empedocles, Seleucus, Diogenes, the Stoics, Aristotle and Xenophanes. As to the atomistic philosophers he men-

¹⁶⁴ Chrys. *Jud. et gent.* 13.9 (PG 48:831): καὶ τυράννων κατ' αὐτῆς ὀπλιζομένων, καὶ στρατιωτῶν ὅπλα κινούντων, καὶ δῆμων πυρὸς σφοδρότερον μαινομένων, καὶ συνηθείας ἀντιπαταταμένης, καὶ ῥητόρων, καὶ σοφιστῶν, καὶ πλουτούντων καὶ ἰδιωτῶν, καὶ ἀρχόντων ἀνισταμένων, πυρὸς σφοδρότερον ἐπιὼν ὁ λόγος τὰς ἀκάνθας ἀνήλωσε, τὰς ἀφούρας ἐξεκάθηρεν, ἔσπειρε τοῦ κηρύγματος τὸν λόγον.

¹⁶⁵ Cyr. *Juln.* 2.13–14 (= PG 76:569C–D).

tions their notion of infinite worlds in the infinite,¹⁶⁶ of the universe being animated through atoms and the void, of its being perishable,¹⁶⁷ and of it not being governed by divine providence, but by automatic movements. According to Cyril, Christianity is superior because unlike this plurality of opinions, there are no contradictions among Moses, the prophets, and the apostles.¹⁶⁸ Their work complements and builds on each other's pronouncements.

Throughout this work Cyril frequently repeats the argument that the Judaeo-Christian tradition predates the age of the first Greek philosophers, arguing that Christianity was therefore superior. In doing so, he drew a line between philosophers like Plato and pre-Socratic philosophers like Empedocles. Introducing the books of Julian as the subject of his refutation, Cyril characterizes the emperor Julian as an author "who composed intolerable accusations against our pure religion by saying that we err" because Julian argued that Christianity had introduced a new way of life, which is consistent neither with the laws of Moses nor with the superstitions of the Greeks. Cyril concedes to Julian that Christians are indeed aloof from "the madness of the Greeks", citing Paul who notes: "What communion has light with darkness or what part has he that believes with an infidel?"¹⁶⁹ Cyril identifies this Greek superstition as their philosophical tradition: Anaximander, Empedocles, Pythagoras, Plato and "others" are given by Cyril as examples of "the inventors of unholy dogmas or, so to say, the sources of their ignorance." It is with these tenets that the Greek children have approached Christianity.¹⁷⁰ Cyril, therefore, proposes to demonstrate the philosophers' opinions as contradictory, discourses that compete against each other whereas the truth of Moses' books, regarding the subjects of both creation and legislation, is unified and inviolate.¹⁷¹

In order to prove the superiority of Christianity, Cyril here confines himself to claiming that Moses is more ancient than the Greek philosophers.¹⁷² Cyril repeats this argument twice throughout book one.¹⁷³ In the first passage he adds that

166 Cyr. *Juln.* 2.14 (= PG 76:572A).

167 Cyr. *Juln.* 2.15 (= PG 76:572B–C).

168 Cyr. *Juln.* 2.16 (= PG 76:572D–573A); cf. 2.11 (= PG 76:568D).

169 Cyr. *Juln.* 1.3 (= PG 76:512C): ὅς τῆς εὐαγοῦς ἡμῶν θρησκείας οὐ φορητὴν ἐποιήσατο τὴν κατάρρησιν, πεπλανῆσθαι λέγων ἡμᾶς ... ὅτι μὲν τῆς Ἑλλήνων ἀπηλλάγμεθα ἐμβροντησίας ... "κοινωνία γὰρ οὐδεμία φωτὶ πρὸς σκότος, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ μερὶς πιστῶ μετὰ ἀπίστου." Quotation: 2Cor. 6:14–15 (abbreviated by Cyril).

170 Cyr. *Juln.* 1.4 (= PG 76:512D–513A, at 513A): οἱ τῶν ἀνοσίων αὐτοῖς δογμάτων γεγόνασιν εὐρέται καὶ ἴν' οὕτως εἶπω τῆς ἀμαθίας πηγαί; cf. 1.40 (= PG 76:545D).

171 Cyr. *Juln.* 1.4 (= PG 76:513A).

172 Cyr. *Juln.* 1.4–5 (= PG 76:513A–C).

173 Cyr. *Juln.* 1.17–19 (= PG 76:524A–525B); 1.40 (= PG 76:548A).

some of the Greek authorities, such as the philosophers Pythagoras, Thales, and Plato as well as Solon the lawgiver had travelled to Egypt and borrowed their knowledge from Moses there.¹⁷⁴ Later, he notes that only Pythagoras and Plato had done so, from whose travels other philosophers in Athens had come across some truth in their tenets as well, whereas Thales, Anaximander, “and the others I mentioned before” were “babblers.”¹⁷⁵ Cyril goes even so far as to claim that Plato’s alleged contact with Moses makes him a better philosopher than others such as Aristotle. Thus, Cyril finds Plato’s arguments along with those of Pythagoras coming close to Moses’, positioning this as a consequence of their having travelled to Egypt, a place where Moses’ writings were allegedly *en vogue*. Plato’s student Aristotle, on the other hand, had suggested ideas different from his teacher’s.¹⁷⁶ This illustrates that, while part of Cyril’s polemical discourse intended to justify some ancient philosophies as related to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, he was as keen to stress that other ancient philosophies did not fit this pattern. He therefore attributed pre-Socratic philosophers like Empedocles to the realm of “darkness.”

Cyril also quotes the emperor Julian’s criticism of the biblical account of creation, which is that Moses does not mention the creation of anti-matter (that is the deep, the darkness, and the water as opposed to the earth, the light, and the dry land) nor does he mention the creation of angels.¹⁷⁷ Against this perspective, Cyril argues that the singularity of God indicates that he had created everything, with the individual entities, such as the angels, being produced at the point of principal creation. Moses, Cyril argues, thus felt it superfluous to explicitly mention these.¹⁷⁸ This again shows that dissidence in terms of conflicting ideas about biblical creation was a prime concern when Christian authors identified heretical or otherwise deviant ideas put forward by Christian or non-Christian groups.

4.7 Conclusion

I have shown in this chapter that from early on in the emergence of Christianity there was ideological conflict and competition between Christian groups and those pagans who supported the ideas of materialist philosophies, although the sources for the early centuries are scanty. This debate can best be grasped

174 Cyr. *Juln.* 1.18–19 (= PG 76:524D–525B); Similarly, Chrys. *hom.* 66 in *Jo.* 3 (PG 59:370).

175 Cyr. *Juln.* 1.40 (= PG 76:548A).

176 Cyr. *Juln.* 2.16–17 (= PG 76:573A–D).

177 Cyr. *Juln.* 2.18–19 (= PG 76:576A–D).

178 Cyr. *Juln.* 2.19–21 (= PG 76:576D–577D); cf. 2.26–9 (PG 76:584A–585C).

from the writings of Christian apologists who argued against these philosophies, while the counter-position remains obscure for want of sources. It is interesting to note that to Christian authors of the late fourth and early fifth centuries materialist philosophies were linked to the persecutions of the past, in particular the Great Persecution, probably because some philosophers acted as advisers of the emperors. Christianity and materialist philosophies were primarily incompatible in the area of the physical understanding of the world: Epicurean atomism, for example, was seen as precluding core aspects of the biblical account, such as creation, afterlife, punishments in hell and concepts about the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ. These opinions were also linked to physical explanations of the universe and thus to questions relating to divination and astrology, as we have already seen. They were therefore felt as threatening the unity of the church as did the conflicting opinions of non-conformist Christians as well. Thus pagan philosophy itself came to be seen as the mother of heresies. While late antique Christian authors were concerned primarily about heretics who had been informed about these philosophical traditions, there was also some expectation (in the east more than in the west) that some of the non-Christians of this time period continued to put forward ideas from materialist philosophies. With regard to the overall picture presented in this book it is important to note that as much as heretical books were burnt or actively excluded from preservation, similar things could happen to texts presenting these ideas, although it is unclear whether original writings by Epicureans or similar groups continued to circulate beyond the fourth century or these ideas were transmitted orally and thus may perhaps have found their way into heretical treatises.

Christian authors employed similar rhetorical strategies to cast doubt on the worthiness of these texts as they did in regard to magic, astrology and divination. These areas have in common that they became illegal because of their power to summon or consult demons. Similarly, Christian authors argued that physical or ethical world views were the work of the devil and were disseminated by his agents, the demons. These demons were contagious, caused diseases and sexual urges, and were keen to prevent human beings from salvation. Book-burning, for example, was an efficient tool to destroy these demons because fire had this purifying property. My argument is that this is the reason why in some historical accounts on book-burning magical books are aligned with philosophical books.

This surely does not mean that any kind of divination or physical explanation of the world was frowned upon by Christian authors such as those that I have discussed. On the contrary, all of them regarded the divine prophecies of the Bible to be true. The difference, then, was between divine and demonical divination. Similarly, all Christian authors regarded nature, the universe or planets

as the creation of God and therefore as something good and worthy to observe and to describe. What they actually shunned is the methodological approach of explaining the movements of the universe as caused by the mechanical movements of atoms and the origin of the world as caused by the clash of atoms, without divine providence.

While I do not intend to argue that by implication this means that writings containing ideas of materialist philosophy were specifically targeted in censorship legislation or that these books were regularly burnt along with heretical, magical or astrological books, my argument is that an unwillingness arose among Christian scribes to preserve any of the works that included these traditions for future generations unless for the explicit purpose of refutation. This does also mean that it was unlikely that these philosophical traditions, if preserved in oral culture, were recorded and preserved in writing. Conversely, this imbrication with philosophical ideas in opposition to Christianity (as perceived by individual authors) was the common denominator that determined which texts were worthy of destruction or deliberate rather than incidental neglect. While it is unlikely that secular authorities were significantly influenced by treatises or sermons of Christian ecclesiastical authors, we have seen that imperial legislation defined the social norms within which clerics and ascetics rather than the public authorities acted. Moreover, while in the Roman minds many kinds of books had a touch of the magical, agreements about what was considered heretical, magical or astrological could change over time, especially since a powerful external party such as the late antique clergy deliberately argued that texts that were once considered appropriate were not appropriate any longer. Just like a magic spell was considered to damage a living being, so too did deviant opinions about the nature of Jesus, or of the universe and its origin, come to be considered as disturbing religious peace. In the next section, I shall discuss the evidence for deliberate or unintentional neglect of books in Late Antiquity alongside moral reservations against literary genres and I shall also put the Christian dialectic between competing literary traditions into a broader context.

5 Moral Disapproval of Literary Genres

In the preceding chapter I have argued that the arguments by some Christian ecclesiastical authors against materialist philosophies were of a different quality compared, for example, to the Christian debate about classical literature. This is because Christian ecclesiastical authors appear to have perceived certain ideas borrowed from these philosophical traditions as an ongoing danger to the unity of Christianity even in Late Antiquity. These Christian authors felt that the old philosophies had often informed dissident ideas of Christian thinkers. It is difficult to say whether or not these Christian authors misrepresented the views of Christian adversaries, but on the balance of probability there is reason to believe that it is credible that non-conformist Christian authors were indeed influenced by the old philosophies. There is evidence in Manichaean primary sources to confirm this.

Many early Christian clerics and ecclesiastical authors felt that the pagan texts of the past were completely unnecessary to lead a Christian life-style. This attitude, however, changed, when Christianity became acceptable to a major part of the population in the third and early fourth centuries. The late fourth and early fifth centuries were a time during which Christian clerics and ecclesiastical authors seriously reviewed the question of which texts were considered to be appropriate. Lay Christians, too, were affected by these changing attitudes. As classical education came to be less and less important for worldly career paths, and clerical career paths became more and more attractive, the preservation of the works of old was endangered. It was at this time that texts were transcribed from papyrus to parchment, and only those texts that were copied on parchment survived over time.

As I noted in my introduction, the major proportion of the work composed in Antiquity has not come down to us today. The bulk of this perished because of neglect and loss of interest. The acknowledgement of its loss is not solely a contemporary feature. Writing in the late-fourth century, John Chrysostom recurrently alludes to the decline of ancient literatures, particularly philosophical texts, as we will shortly see. John aside, though, other sources show little interest in whether or not the works of old were preserved or would survive. Jerome's reference to the recent restoration of early Christian works in the library of Caesarea is the one well-known exception.¹

Illustrating this trend, Gregory of Nazianzus described the fate of rhetorical books in his household. Gregory received his philosophical education in mid-

¹ Hier. *vir. ill.* 113.

fourth century Athens and he was among the Christian scholars who imbricated Christian theology and ancient philosophy. But when asked to send out books to a friend for rhetorical studies, books “that once we owned”, he hesitated to send from his stacks “what had escaped the bookworm and the smoke on top of which they were stored.”²

This chapter will argue that there was a general neglect of ancient literature in Late Antiquity. I shall identify genres which Christian authors attributed to a demonical counter-world as much as they did in regard to some philosophical texts, arguing that, on one hand, the deliberate refusal to copy texts related to ancient religion and cult practice can be seen as an act of censorship, while on the other the same Christian authors came up with a number of strategies to justify an allegorical reading of pagan gods in classical texts, thereby exempting their content from demonisation.

This chapter will first concentrate on a number of statements by John Chrysostom, indicating that ancient philosophy as a whole was in decline by the fourth century. I shall then put these alongside a number of other statements by Libanius, the pagan city-rhetorician and John’s contemporary in Antioch, arguing that the evidence he gives corresponds to the rhetoric found in the sermons of John Chrysostom from a different perspective. I shall then go on to discuss Ammianus Marcellinus’ criticism of the luxurious life-style of Rome’s high society. Libanius is known to have complained about the financial straits the new climate placed his school in. I propose that both authors indirectly blame the neglect of classical and pagan authors on the religious policy of the Christian emperors. I shall go on to argue that important Christian authors, like Jerome, felt themselves to be in the position to influence the transmission of books. Following Jerome’s relatively clear statement, I shall then discuss a number of other Christian authors and the different strategies and recurrent themes they employed to cast doubt on the worthiness of a range of texts (some more than others) within the spectrum of ancient literature. Finally, I shall relate these results to the current scholarly debate on how long classical texts continued to be studied in different parts of the Roman Empire. In the context of this book, the aim of this chapter is to identify possible ways of censorship other than book-burning or outright legal bans.

2 Gr. Naz. *ep.* 235.3: ἰδοῦ σοι καὶ τὰ πυκτὰ παρ’ ἡμῶν ἅπερ αἰτεῖς, ὅσα τοὺς σήτας διέφυγε καὶ τὸν καπνὸν ὑπὲρ οὗ κατέκειτο. Spreyer (1981), 124.

5.1 John Chrysostom and the Decline of Ancient Philosophy

Like other major cities of the east, Antioch became a major scene for conflicting religious views in the late fourth century. In the wake of religious and philosophical discussions, a number of social conflicts and cases of outright violence did occur. This atmosphere of religious conflict was heated up further by street-preaching, classroom education and sermons given in churches. The protagonists were John Chrysostom and his pagan counter-part Libanius. They both represent the attempts of that time either to firmly establish Christianity within the urban upper-class population or to keep things as they were. A prime question of that time was the role that ancient philosophy could play in a society veering towards Christianity, as Christianity came to define itself as the true and only philosophy on earth.

Polemical rhetoric that addresses the end of pagan philosophy as a whole is therefore found across John Chrysostom's corpus of sermons. Identifying recurrent themes of these polemics, I shall argue that his sermons help us understand the different strategies with which to separate true from false philosophy and to cast doubt on the worthiness of the latter.³ Such passages are usually placed within John's comments on Bible passages. In these sermons, John intended to persuade his audience (which he thought too lax) to embrace an extreme Christian lifestyle.

The attitudes towards pagan literature in general displayed in John's sermons depict it as either unimportant or unnecessary to the other end of the spectrum, where he positions it as a dangerous and pernicious influence that should be eradicated. In establishing these positions, John often assumes that the decline of the old philosophers (and their schools) was a consequence of Christianisation, utilising a rhetoric of destruction to depict this. But a significant proportion of these diatribes must be taken as rhetoric only, part of an amplified polemical attack designed to make its point unequivocally and hammer it home to an audience. For example, where he conflates all of pagan philosophy into a unity to depict it being overcome by the apostles and their successors, he is more careful in his discussions of Plato and the classics (for example, poetry). From an *ex eventu* view, John alluded to the competition between Christians and philosophers in the early centuries.

³ Earlier studies include Coleman-Norton (1930); Brändle (1997), 449–60. See also Laistner (1951), 54 with 130, note 14; Amand (1945), 483–94.

With regard to these philosophies, John sometimes develops his theme that Christianity introduced a new life-style, replacing ancestral traditions that were informed by ancient philosophies. An example is a passage from his fifth speech, *Against the Jews*.⁴ John here as elsewhere attempts to prove that the predictions of Christ have come true. He frequently argues that as Christian teaching is widespread around the world and other memorable events are forgotten, Christianity is more powerful.⁵ Although the philosophers attempted to establish their way of life they were ultimately unsuccessful:⁶

Such men as Zeno [of Citium], Plato, Socrates, Diagoras, Pythagoras, and countless others: they have all failed to prevail to the point that they are unknown to the masses even by name. But Christ not only wrote a constitution but even planted it everywhere in the world.

Name-checking philosophers from the sixth to third century BC and the rapidly declining interest in their texts in the past, John appears to imagine that their writings are lost. He could be right because only Plato's writings survive until today, while Socrates is not known to have left anything in writing. It is not clear whether or not Pythagoras left anything in writing, although it is known that his students, including the more recent Neopythagoreans did. It can therefore be surmised that John is downplaying the circulation of ancient texts for purposes of evangelism and missionary conversion.

Another recurrent theme in John's sermons is to prove the truth of Christianity by its success in replacing ancient philosophies, suggesting that philosophical writings were therefore obliterated. Written probably in Antioch of the 390s (and therefore after paganism was practically outlawed), a characteristic example is a polemical passage in John's second *Homily on the Gospel of John*:⁷

⁴ Chrys. *pan. Bab.* 2.117 (SC 362:254) and *Jud.* 5.11.4 (PG 48:900). Lietzmann (1916), 1815 dates the homilies 4–8 against the Jews to autumn 387. No other date has been proposed by Mayer (2005).

⁵ Chrys. *Jud.* 5.2.4 (PG 48:885). Similarly, *hom.* 4 in *Ac.* 3 (PG 60:47): “where is now the vanity of Greece? Where the name of Athens? Where the nonsense of the philosophers?” (ποῦ νῦν τῆς Ἑλλάδος ὁ τύφος; ποῦ τῶν Ἀθηνῶν τὸ ὄνομα; ποῦ τῶν φιλοσόφων ὁ λῆρος;); *hom.* 2 in *Jo.* 1 (PG 59:30). By the end of the fourth century, Athens was indeed relatively unimportant as a centre of philosophy: see Watts (2006), 80–87.

⁶ Chrys. *Jud.* 5.3.1 (PG 48:886): οἷον Ζήνων, Πλάτων, Σωκράτης, Διαγόρας, Πυθαγόρας, καὶ ἔτεροι μύριοι· ἀλλ’ ὅμως τοσοῦτον ἀπέσχον περιγενέσθαι, ὥς μηδὲ ἐξ ὀνόματος εἶναι τοῖς πολλοῖς γνώριμοι. ὁ δὲ Χριστὸς οὐκ ἔγραψε πολιτείαν μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πανταχοῦ τῆς οἰκουμένης αὐτὴν κατεφύτευσε.

⁷ Chrys. *hom.* 2 in *Jo.* 2 (PG 59:31): οὗτος δὴ οὐκ ὁ βάρβαρος, τῇ μὲν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου γραφῇ τὴν οἰκουμένην κατέλαβεν ἅπασαν, τῷ δὲ σώματι μέσσην κατέσχε τὴν Ἀσίαν, ἔνθα τὸ παλαιὸν ἐφιλοσόφουν οἱ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς συμμορίας ἅπαντες, κάκειθεν τοῖς δαίμοσιν ἐστὶ φοβερός, ἐν μέσῳ τῶν

This barbarian [John], with his writing of the gospel, has taken over the whole world. With his body he has occupied the centre of Asia, where previously all of the Greek party philosophised, and he thus terrifies the demons, shining in the middle of his enemies, quenching their darkness, and smashing the stronghold of the demons. But in soul he has retired to that place which is fitting for a person who has done such things. And the [writings] of the Greeks have all perished and are obliterated,⁸ but this man's shine brighter day by day. From the time that he was and the others, since then the [writings] of Pythagoras and of Plato, which seemed before to dominate, have been kept secret, and the crowd does not know them even by name.

John links obliteration of pagan books to religious conflict, particularly to temple destruction, alleging that the destruction of pagan temples and of writings bestows holiness and martyrdom on those involved in such acts: "in soul he has retired to that place which is fitting for a person who has done such things." In this, John is endorsing a common position as Christians who destroyed books were sometimes recognized as holy men in the sources and they were celebrated as such. Those Christians who died when the Serapeum was destroyed in 391, for example, were elevated as martyrs. Name-checking Pythagorean philosophy, John justifies the obliteration of ancient philosophies by the beginning of the Gospel of John, implying that the word (*lógos*) of God is absolute and unchallenged: "Has not all that with good cause perished and been utterly obliterated? – Indeed with good cause and according to the Word!"⁹ In his *Demonstration against the Jews and Pagans* John demonstrates Jesus' divinity as a corollary of the success of Christianisation and the subsequent dissolution of the ancient traditions.¹⁰ This, he suggests, is because the apostles were given power over the demons. In John's metaphorical words, the apostles have "gagged the tongues of the philosophers and stitched shut the mouths of the rhetoricians."¹¹ This passage echoes a similar statement in an unpublished manuscript (attribut-

ἐχθρῶν διαλάμπων, καὶ τὸν ζόφον αὐτῶν σβεννύς, καὶ τὴν ἀκρόπολιν τῶν δαιμόνων καταλύων τῇ δὲ ψυχῇ πρὸς τὸν χώρον ἀνεχώρησεν ἐκεῖνον, τὸν ἀρμόττοντα τῷ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐργασασμένῳ. καὶ τὰ μὲν Ἑλλήνων ἔσβεσται ἅπαντα καὶ ἡφάνισται, τὰ δὲ τούτου καθ' ἑκάστην λαμπρότερα γίνεται. ἐξ ὅτου γὰρ καὶ οὗτος καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀλιεῖς, ἐξ ἐκείνου τὰ μὲν Πυθαγόρου σεσίγηται καὶ τὰ Πλάτωνος, δοκοῦντα πρότερον κρατεῖν, καὶ οὐδὲ ἐξ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ ἴσασιν οἱ πολλοί.

⁸ *LSJ*, 1587, lists for the passive voice of σβέννυμι (literally: "to quench, to put out", likewise Lampe, *PGL*, 1227) the following pertinent translations: "to become extinct, die" (of men), "to be quelled, lulled, quenched" (of wind, sound, of an orator), and "to be extinguished".

⁹ Chrys. *hom.* 2 in Jo. 2 (PG 59:32): ἄρ' οὐκ εἰκότως πάντα ἐσβέσθη ἐκεῖνα, καὶ ἡφανίσθη τέλεον; εἰκότως, καὶ κατὰ λόγον.

¹⁰ Chrys. *Jud. et gent.* 1.8 (PG 48:813–14): παλαιὰ ἔθη.

¹¹ Chrys. *Jud. et gent.* 5.3 (PG 48:820): φιλοσόφων ἐπιστομίζειν γλώσσαν, ῥητόρων ἀπορράπτειν στόματα.

ed to John) which asserts that “the senate decrees have been overthrown, the philosophers and orators have been put to shame, and the Areopagus has been wiped out.”¹² This statement could be right because it is attested that in the last quarter of the fourth century large private mansions were constructed on the Areopagus hill, traditionally a place that housed archives.¹³

Emphasising its success, John explains the rise of Christianity as a conflict between Christians and pagans, who had as teachers the apostles and the philosophers respectively, for example, in the context of discussing a passage from the Second Letter to the Corinthians: “Where is Plato? Nowhere! Where Paul? In the mouths of all! Where is Plato? He is kept secret and has passed into oblivion.”¹⁴ In consequence, John thinks that even uneducated individuals who believe in Christianity have become true philosophers because Christianity is much easier to understand than ancient philosophies.¹⁵ This again shows John’s unusually negative attitudes towards Platonic philosophy that were not shared by most of his contemporaries.

John links the success of Christianity to the physical decline of ancient philosophical books in the fifth *Homily on the Acts of the Apostles*, written in Constantinople probably around 400: “The sophists, rhetoricians, and philosophers [...] have rotted away in the Academia and the Peripatos.”¹⁶ Suggesting that philosophy should be aligned with magic in this context, it appears that John is conceptualising the books associated with these schools imaginatively rotting away rather than positing that they actually rotted away in actual buildings. Neither the Peripatos nor the Academy in Athens are attested since beyond the Early Empire, but that the writings of both philosophers (Plato and Aristotle who founded these schools) were still received even after John wrote this text indicates the metaphorical nature of his attack.

Further references to the decline of various philosophical schools and traditions appear in John’s work, such as to the Cynics in the *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*.¹⁷ The Cynics were a philosophical school that enjoyed popularity up

12 Voicu (1997), 515: *Senatsbeschlüsse sind von den Aposteln umgestürzt, Philosophen u. Redner beschämt u. der Areopag vernichtet worden* referring to the unpublished manuscript *Cod. Vat. Gr. 455 fol. 119^v*.

13 Watts (2006), 80–81.

14 Chrys. *ejusdem in illud, si qua in Christo* (PG 64:26): ποῦ Πλάτων; οὐδαμοῦ· ποῦ Παῦλος; ἐν τοῖς ἀπάντων στόμασι. ποῦ Πλάτων; σεσίγται, καὶ λήθη παραδέδοται.

15 Thus in Chrys. *hom. 4 in 1 Cor.* 3 (PG 61:34); *stat.* 19.1 (PG 49:189).

16 Chrys. *hom. 4 in Ac.* 3 (PG 60:47): πρὸς σοφιστῶν, πρὸς ῥητόρων, πρὸς φιλοσόφων πλῆθος, τῶν κατασαπέντων ἐν Ἀκαδημίᾳ καὶ Περιπάτοις.

17 Chrys. *hom. 10 in Mt.* 4 (PG 57:188).

to the reign of Julian.¹⁸ John claims that they were not popular any more, although it must be noted that he was unlikely to be informed about the situation outside of Antioch. He notes, however: “The Cynics, mere outcasts as they were, have all passed by like a dream and a shadow”, juxtaposing the disappearance of this school as well as of those of the Platonists, Pythagoreans and Stoics to Christianity’s struggle for acceptance and the Christian martyrs.¹⁹ Cynical philosophers embraced an ascetic lifestyle and often led the lives of beggars. They were thus a rival group for monks. John’s argument must be viewed as a reconstruction *ex eventu*, however, because the Pythagoreans and Stoics had vanished by the late fourth century, although the Pythagorean and Stoic thoughts still influenced contemporary works.

Repeating this attack, John also ridiculed ancient philosophy in a speech that he gave in Constantinople on Easter probably of AD 399 to the community of Gothic *foederati*.²⁰ This text is a unique document as it offers evidence for the communication between a powerful Christian bishop and the Goths. Although diminished by a massacre in Constantinople, these *foederati* were a similar cultural group to those Goths who invaded Rome about a decade later under the leadership of Alaric.²¹ At the beginning of his sermon, John states that he wishes that the Greeks were also present so that he could show them the truth of the Christian faith and the ridiculousness of their demons:²²

For that of the philosophers has been destroyed among those who speak the same language, but our [teaching] has great power even among those who speak foreign languages. The former has been torn apart easier than a spider’s web, the latter has been fixed more firmly than steel. Where is that of Plato, Pythagoras, and of those in Athens? It has perished.

This theme of Christianity proven as true because of its success informs another recurrent theme. On a number of occasions John commemorates Christian mar-

18 See Bracht Branham and Goulet-Cazé (1996). Other Christian authors were less opposed to Cynicism because it was close to Christian asceticism: Downing (1992). The last Cynic known is Sallustius in the fifth-century, mentioned in Damascius’ *Life of Isidore*: Dudley (1937), 202–8.

19 Chrys. *hom. 33 in Mt. 4* (PG 57:392): καὶ τὰ Κυνικά καθάρματα ὥσπερ ὄναρ καὶ σκιά πάντες παρήλθον.

20 On the date, Mayer (2005), 156.

21 On the historical context, Albert (1984), 174; Schäferdiek (1996), 142, note 105 and 131–2; Alan Cameron and Long (1993).

22 Chrys. *VIII homilia habita postquam presbyter Gothus concionatus fuerat* 1 (PG 63:500–501): τὰ μὲν γὰρ τῶν φιλοσόφων καὶ παρὰ τοῖς ὁμοφώνοις καταλέλυται, τὰ δὲ ἡμέτερα καὶ παρὰ ἑτερογλώσσοις πολλὴν ἔχει δύναμιν· καὶ τὰ μὲν ἀράχνης εὐκολώτερον διεσπάσθη, τὰ δὲ ἀδάμαντος στερέρότερον πέπηγε. ποῦ τὰ Πλάτωνος καὶ Πυθαγόρου καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἀθήναις; ἐσβέσθη.

tyrdom during the Great Persecution, putting it as if the whole of pagan rulers and philosophers were unsuccessfully engaged in destroying Christianity and therefore perished.²³ Thus, commenting on an eschatological line from the Gospel of Matthew, John appears to be alluding either to pagan intellectual attacks and destruction of words or, more literally, to Roman authorities burning Christian books a century ago:²⁴

‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away’ [Matt. 24:35]. It is easier that the sun vanishes and that the heaven is obliterated than that the words of my Lord are destroyed. The experience of facts bears witness to it, the length of time, and the attacks of our enemies; for it is miraculous of course not only that these words have not been destroyed but that these overcame the adversary’s.

The enemies here are enemies of faith, notably philosophers. John’s attack against philosophical counter-arguments leads us to another recurring theme: that John justified Christian rejection of ancient philosophy by referring to the Letter to the Corinthians. For example, rebutting the moderate position that philosophy had to be counted among the work of God, John offers a line from the Letter to the Corinthians: “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him.”²⁵ John goes on to suggest that “curious research and superfluous sweetness of words” are the wisdom of this world and should be shunned.²⁶ In another homily of this series, John frames the dialectic between Christianity and philosophy as a broken literary tradition from the same Letter to the Corinthians, separating wisdom into that “of this age” and the secret wisdom of God.²⁷ Pagan wisdom is positioned as “foolishness.”²⁸ The “rulers of this age” are arbiters of “foolish” wisdom.

²³ Chrys. *hom. 4 in 1 Cor.* 3–4 (PG 61:34–5); *hom. 2 in Jo.* 3–4 (PG 59:32–4).

²⁴ Chrys. *eiusdem in illud, si qua in Christo* (PG 64:26): “ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ παρελεύσονται, οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου οὐ μὴ παρέλθωσιν.” εὐκολώτερον τὸν ἥλιον σβεσθῆναι, καὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀφανισθῆναι, ἢ τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ ἐμοῦ Δεσπότης καταλυθῆναι. καὶ μαρτυρεῖ τούτοις τῶν πραγμάτων ἡ πείρα, καὶ τοῦ χρόνου τὸ μήκος, καὶ τῶν πολεμούντων αἱ ἔφοδοι· τὸ γὰρ δὴ θαυμαστὸν, ὅτι οὐ μόνον οὐ κατελύθη, ἀλλ’ ὅτι καὶ πολεμούμενος περιγίνεται. Similarly, PG 64:27: “‘In the beginning was the Word.’ Since the fisherman had spoken this word, how many tyrants had wished to obliterate it but did not succeed?” (“ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος.” πόσοι τύραννοι ἐξότε ἐφθέγγατο ὁ ἄλκιμος τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο ἀφανίσαι ἤθελον, καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσαν;).

²⁵ 1Cor. 2:14: ψυχικὸς δὲ ἄνθρωπος οὐ δέχεται τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ, μωρία γὰρ αὐτῷ ἐστίν. Quoting only the first line in slight variation.

²⁶ Chrys. *hom. 7 in 1 Cor.* 4 (PG 61:60): καὶ γὰρ σοφίαν ἐνταῦθα τὸ περίεργον τῆς ζητήσεως λέγει, καὶ τὴν περιττὴν εὐγλωττίαν.

²⁷ 1Cor. 2:6–7.

²⁸ Chrys. *hom. 7 in 1 Cor.* 1 (PG 61:53–4).

These rulers, who John suggests are demons, are also popular leaders, such as philosophers and rhetoricians, emphasising that their rule does not extend into “the present age.” As a consequence, it is inherently “of short duration” in the letter to the Corinthians and all of these groups have now been abolished.²⁹ John is therefore again using a rhetoric of destruction in order to downplay the actual importance that these authors may still have had among his audience.

Describing the harmful effects of demons, John frequently attacks ancient philosophy as spider-webs snaring the unwary. This metaphor is based on John’s perception of philosophy as useless, difficult, obscure and therefore worthy to be obliterated, as we can see in the following passage that sets out to emphasise Christianity’s triumph over pagan philosophy:³⁰

Yet these high doctrines were both accepted and believed, and they flourish every day and increase; but the others have passed away, and perished, having been more easily obliterated than spiders’ webs. And with very good cause, for they were demons that declared this. Besides their impudence, their darkness is great, and the trouble that they cause is greater.

Similarly in the context of alleged imperial attacks against Christians, he alludes to the role of saints and martyrs in this conflict, perhaps alluding to the historical background of the Great Persecution:³¹

Yet, all their schemes and charges were torn apart more easily than spider-webs, they were dispersed more swiftly than smoke, and passed away faster than dust. For with such attacks they had increased the choir of martyrs, leaving behind those immortal treasures of the Church, her pillars and ramparts.

²⁹ Chrys. *hom. 7 in 1. Cor.* 1 (PG 61:55): παρών αἰών ... ὀλιγοχρόνιος ... τῶν καταργουμένων.

³⁰ Chrys. *hom. 1 in Mt.* 5 (PG 57:19): ἀλλ’ ὅμως καὶ ἐδέχθη καὶ ἐπιστεύθη τὰ ὑψηλὰ ταῦτα δόγματα, καὶ καθ’ ἐκάστην ἀνθεὶ τὴν ἡμέραν, καὶ ἐπιδίδωσι. τὰ δὲ ἐκείνων οἴχεται καὶ ἀπόλωλεν, ἀραχνίων εὐκολώτερον ἀφανισθέντα. καὶ μάλα εἰκότως· δαίμονες γὰρ ταῦτα διηγόρευον. διὸ μετὰ τῆς ἀσελγείας καὶ πολὺν ἔχει τὸν ζόφον, καὶ πλείω τὸν πόνον.

³¹ Chrys. *Jud. et gent.* 15.2 (PG 48:833): ἀλλ’ ὅμως πᾶσαι αὐταὶ αἱ ἐπιβουλαὶ καὶ ἔφοδοι ἀράχνης εὐκολώτερον διεσπάσθησαν, καπνοῦ θάπτον διελύθησαν, κονιορτοῦ ταχύτερον παρήλθον. δι’ ὧν γὰρ ἐπεβούλευσαν, πολὺν μαρτύρων χορὸν ἐργασάμενοι, καὶ τοὺς ἀθανάτους ἐκείνους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀφέντες θησαυροὺς, τοὺς στύλους, τοὺς πύργους. Cf. in *Diem Natalem Jesu Christi* 6 (PG 49:358–9) on philosophical arguments against Christians (for example, against incarnation).

So, this text posits a strategy of Christianisation that focuses on the conversion of the uneducated and emphasises the ways that Christianity has metaphorically torn apart pagan wisdom and repelled imperial attacks against it.

Emphasising the faith-based nature of Christianity over the curiosity that informed the previous philosophies, John pictures Paul the apostle (a tentmaker by profession) standing in the Forum holding the tentmaker's knife to show that even the unlearned could philosophise if they were Christians.³² Implying that Christianity has demolished other schools, this symbolism alludes to the persuasive force of Christianity:³³

But still he appeared in public, and it was only by means of his appearance that he confounded all that of his enemies, overthrowing it all, and as if fire was falling on straw and hay, in this way he burned to ashes that of the demons and, in whatever way he wanted, overturned everything.

In context, John takes up a number of motifs that we have already identified. Thus, in a highly charged passage John compares the dissemination of the gospel to a battle between high and low, between educated and uneducated, in which Christians fought back with bare hands, noting that Christianity was successful as people had to give up their comfortable life-style and security:³⁴

Tell me the reason why those from the opposite side [Christians] overcame their enemies, whenever you see the opposite of previous values occurring, and their wealth, nobility, force of rhetoric, their security, their widely-practised cult and all their innovations having at once been extinguished.

Enforcing this, John argues that Christianity was successful as it replaced the old religion, the pagan customs and ancient traditions of people, again alluding to the purifying force of fire and its power to expel demons:³⁵

32 Chrys. *laud. Paul.* 4.10 (SC 300:202).

33 Chrys. *laud. Paul.* 4.10 (SC 300:204–6): ἀλλ' ὅμως ἐλθὼν εἰς μέσον, καὶ φανείς μόνον, πάντα ἐτάραξε τὰ τῶν ἐναντίων, πάντα συνέχευε, καὶ καθάπερ πῦρ εἰς καλάμην ἐμπεσὼν καὶ χόρτον, οὕτω κατέκαυσε τὰ τῶν δαιμόνων, καὶ εἰς ἅπερ ἐβούλετο, πάντα μετέστησε.

34 Chrys. *laud. Paul.* 4.13 (SC 300:210–12): ὅταν γὰρ ἴδῃς τὰ ἐναντία τούτων συνδραμόντα, καὶ πλοῦτον, καὶ εὐγένειαν, καὶ πατρίδος μέγεθος, καὶ ῥητορείας δεινότητα, καὶ ἄδειαν καὶ θεραπείαν πολλήν, καὶ εὐθέως σβεσθέντα τὰ καινοτομηθέντα, τούτους δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐναντίων περιγενομένους, τί τὸ αἴτιον, εἰπέ μοι;

35 Chrys. *laud. Paul.* 4.18 (SC 300:220–22): καὶ ὥσπερ πυρᾶς ἀναφθείσης, αἱ ἄκανθαι, κατὰ μικρὸν δαπανώμεναι, εἴκουσι καὶ παραχωροῦσι τῇ φλογί, καὶ καθαρὰς ποιοῦσι τὰς ἀρούρας· οὕτω δὴ καὶ τῆς Παύλου γλώττης φθεγγομένης, καὶ πάντα πυρὸς σφοδρότερον ἐπιούσης, εἶκεν ἅπαντα καὶ παρεχώρει, καὶ δαιμόνων θεραπείαι, καὶ ἑορταί, καὶ πανηγύρεις, καὶ πάτρια

And just like a fire is started, the spikes are gradually burnt and disappear, consumed by the flames, the fields having been purified; in this way, the tongue of Paul shouts, attacking all more vehemently than fire, and everything gives way, the cult of the demons, the spectacles and festivals, the tradition of the forefathers [...] and the evil works of the false prophets. [...] Wherever Paul has sown this, the error is dispelled, the truth remains. Smoke and fume, all the cymbals, the drums, carousals, drunkenness, frivolity, adultery, and other horrors, which they used to celebrate in their temples of idols, have gone out and have been torn apart, just like wax is melted by fire and straw is consumed by the flame.

Following this, John reminds his audience of those philosophers that had been expelled already in classical times in order to admonish his audience that the time of pagan philosophers is over.³⁶

In sum, we have seen that throughout his voluminous sermons, John Chrysostom often presents the rise of Christianity as a struggle between the apostles and their successors, Christian martyrs, and ancient philosophers as rivalling groups. He claims that as a consequence of this rivalry, much of the knowledge of the latter (in written or oral tradition) has been obliterated; however, with regard to some of these philosophies, John's claim is wishful thinking, aimed at downplaying their importance as he wanted to persuade others not to believe in these opinions.

Although it is difficult to date exactly John's various works, the changing attitudes of his texts can be traced and interpreted as occurring over the course of a career. We find some of the most radical polemics in texts that are probably related to the Statue Riot in Antioch of 387, which I shall discuss in the next section in greater detail. At this time in particular, his discourses against pagans appear to reflect the attitudes of the ascetic-monastic communities that he was personally acquainted with as he vigorously justified the actions of the monks and their clash with the local philosophers. As Tiersch has noted, it was John's role in the affair that ultimately saw him recommended to the election for the vacant see in Constantinople.³⁷ However, once in this position he oscillates between continuing to encourage the obliteration of pagan books and being realistic enough not to attempt to fully dissuade Constantinople's upper strata entirely from being

ἔθῃ ... καὶ ψευδαποστόλων κακουργίαι· ... καὶ τοῦ Παύλου πανταχοῦ τοῦτο διασπείροντος, ἡλαύνετο μὲν ἡ πλάνη, ἐπανήκει δὲ ἡ ἀλήθεια, κνῖσαι δὲ καὶ καπνός, καὶ κύμβαλα καὶ τύμπανα, καὶ μέθαι καὶ κῶμοι, καὶ πορνεῖαι, καὶ μοιχεῖαι, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα, ἃ μὴδὲ εἰπεῖν καλόν, τὰ ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς τῶν εἰδώλων τελούμενα ἔλῃγε καὶ ἐδαπανᾶτο, καθάπερ κηρὸς ὑπὸ πυρὸς τηκόμενα, καθάπερ ἄχυρα ὑπὸ φλογὸς δαπανώμενα.

³⁶ Chrys. *laud. Paul.* 4.19 (SC 300:224–6).

³⁷ Tiersch (2002), 108–10.

educated in what is helpful for a wordly career, particularly in rhetoric and in pagan literature. In the next section I shall argue that there is some confirmation for this decline of ancient philosophy and of classical studies in general and that this can be grasped from the statements found in John's pagan contemporary, Libanius.

5.2 Libanius' Complaints

Neglect of ancient literature could take many forms. Outwith of deliberate or ideologically motivated disregard, it is reasonable to assume that then as now public libraries in Late Antiquity could suffer from funding cuts. Traditionally, the decurions of the city were in charge of maintaining public institutions out of their own private wealth. But from the third century onwards, it is evident that these local elites increasingly began to avoid the burden of public liturgies, often disbursing these expenses by entering the military and the clergy – professions which exempted them from this financial obligation. In Christian cities the bishop gradually replaced the ancient administrative infrastructure and withdrawing funding from institutions that could disseminate pagan or anti-Christian material was in the interest of both the clergy and the Christian emperors.³⁸ Although emperors could and did patronise learning, their inclination and emphasis was not towards pagan philosophy.³⁹ As evidence of the impact the shift in this administrative emphasis caused, around 370, Basil complained that there were no learned discussions any more in the forum and that gymnasia had been closed in Caesarea.⁴⁰ It is likely that this was because their funding had been choked off. Basil's position, and the likelihood that the emerging infrastructure was the cause of this, is indicated by Salvian's criticism of Greek gymnasia in Carthage in the fifth century. Salvian argued that they were immoral and unchristian because men used to exercise naked there.⁴¹

Libanius' work highlights the impact of funding cuts by a Christian emperor on the teaching of the classics, as I shall argue in this section. He is a representative of the pagan group which John had in mind when he spoke out against ancient literature. He was the city-rhetor of Antioch and allegedly John's early teacher. In a speech probably delivered in 361⁴², Libanius asked the city council

³⁸ See Liebeschuetz (2001), 104–202.

³⁹ See Schlange-Schöningen (1995), esp. 111 on Constantinople.

⁴⁰ Bas. *ep.* 74.3.

⁴¹ Salv. *gub.* 7.68–77.

⁴² On the date, Norman (2000), 67–8.

to maintain the public teaching profession. His argument acknowledges that he is fortunate enough to hold a secure position, but bewails “the misery of our schools” in asking for the reinstatement of the financial aid that pays for the “four assistants who lead the youth towards knowledge of the classics.”⁴³ Although it indicates that financial constraints in education are not simply a contemporary issue but a perennial theme in civilised societies, if the date is correct Libanius is effectively blaming Constantius II personally for this. He argues that the emperor despises this profession and its teachings, “even though it is naturally good.” Placing his argument within a wider context, Libanius briefly alludes to monks demolishing temples and the increasing disrespect that is being shown to his pagan religion.⁴⁴ While Sandwell has dismissed these statements as being incidental,⁴⁵ Norman correctly notes that Libanius is criticising the educational policy of the Christian administration in a generalized and non-specific way, to avoid further conflict.⁴⁶ To my mind, as scholars like Festugière have argued, this is significant: Libanius as a pagan scholar was witnessing the Greek cultural tradition being threatened by the suppression of paganism.⁴⁷ Although its tone therefore acknowledges the forces ranged against him, he is clearly making a stand and this should be recognized.

The epilogue to this episode is that in another speech probably given in 382 Libanius expresses his hope shortly after the accession of Theodosius that the new emperor would be more tolerant than Valens, a ruler who had persecuted philosophers.⁴⁸ He contends that Constantius had never invited philosophers and teachers of rhetoric to his court, instead welcoming Christians in the senatorial rank, “confounded eunuchs [...], those enemies of the gods, denizens of grave-yards, whose proud boast it is to belittle Helios and Zeus and his fellow-rulers”, arguing that these Christians had “expelled the rhetorical education.”⁴⁹ As a consequence, he argues that students had lost any interest to “go through many poets, many orators and all kinds of literature” because they did not see it

43 Lib. or. 31.8: τῶν ἐν τοῖς διδασκαλείοις κακῶς ... τέτταρες ἡγούμενοι τοῖς νέοις ἐπὶ τὴν γνῶσιν τῶν ἀρχαίων, similarly: 31.11, 13.

44 Lib. or. 31.26: κἂν χρηστὸν ἢ τῇ φύσει, 28.

45 Sandwell (2007), 178.

46 Norman (2000), 69; Lib. or. 31.48: “I know how to sing the praises of those who reach a right decision and how to write appropriately about those who oppose it” (ὥς οὖν εἰδότης ἐμοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἃ δεῖ ψηφίζομένους ἐπαινεῖν καὶ περὶ τῶν ἐναντιουμένων ἃ προσήκει γράφειν).

47 Festugière (1959), 229–40; Petit (1955), 191–216.

48 On the date and background, Norman (2000), 87–8.

49 Lib. or. 62.9–10: ὀλέθρους τινὰς εὐνούχους ... οἱ δὲ τὴν μὲν τῶν λόγων παιδευσιν ἤλαυνον ... τοὺς θεοῖς ἐχθρούς, τοὺς περὶ τοὺς τάφους, ὧν τὸ σεμνὸν διασύραι τὸν Ἥλιον καὶ τὸν Δία καὶ τοὺς σὺν ἐκείνῳ ἄρχοντα, with Norman (2000), 92 notes 8–9.

as aiding them in their careers.⁵⁰ This shows that classical literature (although still studied at that time) became less and less important for career paths and was therefore likely to be neglected.

Moreover, in 387 a riot also broke out in Antioch, known as the Riot of the Statues, a major example for the religious unrest of that time. When emperor Theodosius called for heavier taxation, the crowd pulled down imperial images and statues. Following the riot, John composed *On the Statues*, a series of 21 homilies in which he argued that the reaction of the emperor was ultimately beneficial to the city as he did away with all pagan spectacles – sinful from a sincere Christian standpoint – albeit temporarily.⁵¹

In the seventeenth homily of this series, delivered on 27 March 387,⁵² John says that Antioch's "pagan philosophers, dog-like outcasts who are more pitiful than dogs under the table and do everything for the sake of their stomachs",⁵³ had all left the city apparently out of fear of punishment, having been suspected of antagonism towards the Christian emperor. Apparently, they were cynical philosophers (from *kyniká*, "dog-like"). John suggests that when the philosophers fled to the desert outside the city, local monks came to Antioch to appeal to the imperial magistrates "like noble warriors who [...] shout and put their rivals to flight", noting that as a result the forum was now roamed only by true philosophers – the monks.⁵⁴ They later retreated to the mountains. In another homily in this series, he observed that "unseasonable laughter, shameful words and all cheerfulness were expelled", alluding to and suggesting that the flight of the philosophers was caused by the arrival of the monks and that therefore Christian faith had metaphorically driven out pagan philosophies.⁵⁵

50 Lib. or. 62.10, 12: διὰ πολλῶν μὲν ποιητῶν ἀφικέσθαι, πολλῶν δὲ ῥητόρων καὶ παντοδαπῶν ἐτέρων συγγραμμάτων. Similarly, in a speech probably from around the same time (Martin, 1988, 3 suggests 380 or 381 as the date of composition) Libanius again blames the decline of education in the classics on Christians whom he addresses but refuses to call by name: Lib. or. 2.59. See also: Lib. or. 2.26, 43–52; 2.30–31, 74.

51 On this argument, Chrys. stat. 17.2 (PG 49:176 = Mayer and Allen, 111–12).

52 Date according to van de Paverd (1991), 352–7.

53 Chrys. stat. 17.2 (PG 49:173 = Mayer and Allen, 108): οἱ τῶν ἔξωθεν φιλοσοφοί, τὰ κυνικὰ καθάρματα, οἱ τῶν ἐπιτραπέζιων κυνῶν ἀθλιώτερον διακείμενοι, καὶ γαστρός ἔνεκεν πάντα ποιῶντες.

54 Chrys. stat. 17.2 (PG 49:174 = Mayer and Allen, 109): καθάπερ οἱ γενναῖοι τῶν ἀριστέων... καὶ βοήσαντες τρέπονται τοὺς ἀντιπάλους. Lib. or. 23.4: "They left their workshops, their houses and tenements" (οὕτω κενὰ μὲν ἐργαστήρια, κενὰς δὲ οἰκίας τε καὶ συνοικίας ἀφέντες).

55 Chrys. stat. 6.1 (PG 49:82): ὅτι γέλως ἄκαιρος καὶ αἰσχρὰ ῥήματα, καὶ διάχυσις ἅπανα ἀπελήλαται. See van de Paverd (1991), 47. Similarly, hom. 2 in Rom. 4 (PG 60:405): "In the present time ... both in the city and in the desert itself ... all impiety has been driven out." (τὸν παρόντα

Despite John's polemics and the historical circumstances, Libanius was able to continue operating his school.⁵⁶ Yet as we have seen even Libanius saw funding choked off for his school and personally felt some pressure: he himself was repeatedly charged with practising magic.⁵⁷ He notes that in the same year, pagan teaching was indeed in a particularly difficult situation: "The studies on rhetoric and the teaching of grammar have been abolished. There is no teacher and no student."⁵⁸ In another sermon, Libanius goes on to describe the consequences of the riots of 387 in more detail, noting "students seized upon the event as an excuse for holidays [...] tied up their books, mounted their horses..."⁵⁹ While it is clear that he blames Christianity for this, it is also apparent that they did not desert their studies for long, as he describes in a later speech (*Or.* 34.12). While this episode appears to be somewhat limited in time, nevertheless it does show the increasing tendency that upper-class young people, while continuing to be educated in the classics, became less likely to invest much money, time and effort in learning these. In the next section, I shall argue that Ammianus criticised the imperial policy in ways similar to Libanius and therefore confirmed the general feeling that some pagan literatures were in decline, as is indicated also in the polemical passages by John Chrysostom that I have already discussed.

5.3 The Decline of Libraries in Rome

The city of Rome was the main supplier of books in the Western Roman Empire. Despite all military setbacks, it continued to hold this position throughout the early Middle Ages and reportedly served as a centre for literary studies until at least the early fifth century. In the late fourth century, most of its senators were swift to convert to Christianity, although pagan religion continued to be preserved among some of their members associated with Symmachus and Nicomachus Flavianus. This religious change gave rise to a number of conflicts, known

καιρόν ... κατὰ κόμην καὶ πόλιν, καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ἐρήμῳ ... πᾶσα ἀσέβεια ἐξελήλαται) and 5 (*PG* 60:406).

⁵⁶ This is known from *Lib. or.* 34 (and other speeches by Libanius), translated and commented by Norman (2000), 133–44.

⁵⁷ *Lib. or.* 1.41–8, 50, 62–4, 98–100, 243–50 (Lotz, 2005, 198).

⁵⁸ *Lib. or.* 19.61: καταλέλυνται μὲν αἱ περὶ τοὺς λόγους διατριβαί, καταλέλυνται δὲ αἱ περὶ τὰ γράμματα διδασκαλῖαι. διδάσκει δὲ οὐδεὶς οὐδὲ μανθάνει.

⁵⁹ *Lib. or.* 23.20: τῶν νέων ... οἱ μὲν ἤρπασαν τὸν καιρόν εἰς ἀργίαν, ... δῆσαντες τὰς διφθέρας ἀναβάντες ἐφ' ἵππους.

best from the controversy surrounding the altar of Victory in 384. The traditional view is that people associated with Symmachus and Nicomachus Flavianus, a group that was pagan at first and Christianised later, commissioned the manuscript tradition of Latin classical works that survive until today, while the emperors had little interest to preserve the works of old.

Libanius' defence of pagan traditions in Antioch therefore provides a pertinent background against which to reread Ammianus' well known passage on the fate of ancient libraries in Rome. I shall put this passage into the context of other pertinent passages by Ammianus, arguing that he alludes to an atmosphere of denunciation that was potentially detrimental to the interest in some pagan works of old. Originally from Antioch, Ammianus came to Rome and wrote in Latin. Based on parallel sources the following digression in one of Ammianus' early books is assumed to be from the early 380s.⁶⁰ Similarly to Libanius, he complains about the decadence of fourth-century high society and therefore accounts for the loss of books at that time:⁶¹

In this situation the few houses which were previously celebrated for the serious culture of studies are now filled with the trivial pursuits of passive idleness, echoing with the sound of singing and the resounding twanglings of strings. Finally, instead of the philosopher the singer is called in and instead of the orator the teacher of entertaining arts, while the libraries, like tombs, are closed forever.

Early research and some modern scholars have read Ammianus' line on the closure of the libraries as indicating that the public libraries of Rome were shut or dismantled by the Christian emperors.⁶² However, Houston has convincingly argued that Ammianus was alluding only to private libraries, indicating that the fate of Rome's public libraries remains unknown. In this context, it is clear that Ammianus is complaining about the frivolity and ignorance of senators, a tack which does not explicitly suggest the involvement of Christianity in this process. On the other hand, Houston does not find it implausible that most public libraries disappeared as a result of imperial religious policy.⁶³ This is because

⁶⁰ De Jonge (1935), ad locum, p. 145; Houston (1988), 258–9.

⁶¹ Amm. 14.6.18: *quod cum ita sit, paucae domus studiorum seriis cultibus antea celebratae nunc ludibriis ignaviae torpentis exundant vocabili sonu perflabili tinnitu fidium resultantes. denique pro philosopho cantor et in locum oratoris doctor artium ludicrarum accitur et bibliothecis sepulchrorum ritu in perpetuum clausis.*

⁶² See Houston (1988), 258–9 on previous literature in favour of the destruction theory. More recently, von Albrecht (1994), 1382 with note 2, links the passage to Rome's public libraries. So too Fedeli (1989), 58–9; Lapidge (2006), 12.

⁶³ Houston (1988), 262 note 5.

catalogues and inscriptions from around 400 and later, such as the *Notitia dignitatum*, do not mention libraries or librarians and temples were generally not restored any more in Rome since the late fourth century.⁶⁴ By contrast, two documents from the fourth century respectively attest 28 and 29 libraries for the city of Rome, although they do not mention their size.⁶⁵ Seven of these are archaeologically attested, seven more in historical accounts.⁶⁶

Apart from people like Symmachus and Nicomachus Flavianus, the majority of aristocrats whose religious identification is known were Christians.⁶⁷ It therefore appears that Ammianus is alluding to Christian rather than to pagan senators in the passage on the libraries. Ammianus continues with this polemical theme within a catalogue of vices related to the situation in Rome in 371/2 where he highlights:⁶⁸

first the errors of the nobility, as I have done a few times before as far as space allowed [...] confining the incidents to a rapid digression. [...] Some detest learning like poison, but read Juvenal and Marius Maximus with fairly careful eagerness, whereas they touch no other volumes in their profound leisure time, but why this should be so is not for my poor judgment to decide.

As we have already seen, Prudentius, a Christian poet close to the senate, also depicts the pagan studies represented by Symmachus as “poison.”⁶⁹ Other Christian authors and also imperial laws frequently employ the poison-metaphor in regard to forbidden texts. Following on from his attack, Ammianus goes on to mention that the nobles use magic charges to blackmail people financially.⁷⁰ Such allegations could be personally damaging and it was not in the interests of most individuals to be charged with disseminating magic or to be found owning any writings linked to this practice.

A few decades after Ammianus, Macrobius complains about early poets such as Ennius being neglected in his age. This passage has been much debated, but it

⁶⁴ See recently Alan Cameron (2011), 49–50.

⁶⁵ See Houston (1988).

⁶⁶ See Pöhlmann (1994), 58.

⁶⁷ See Salzmann (2002), p. 228, Table 6.1 and p. 65–8.

⁶⁸ Amm. 28.4.6: *et primo nobilitatis, ut aliquotiens pro locorum copia fecimus ... errata, incidentia veloci constringentes excessu, ... 14: quidam detestantes ut venena doctrinas Iuvenalem et Marium Maximum curatius studio legunt, nulla volumina praeter haec in profundo otio contrectantes, quam ob causam non iudicium est nostri.*

⁶⁹ For example, Prud. c.Symm. 1 pr. 78: *ingenii virus.*

⁷⁰ Amm. 28.4.25.

appears that Macrobius positions stylistic rather than religious reasons as the cause of the neglect of “any old library.”⁷¹

In a landmark article, Bloch had coined this notion of a pagan revival among senators of Rome in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Bloch suggested that pagan senators, such as Symmachus and his contemporary Nicomachus Flavianus, actively safeguarded the classical literary heritage against a hostile Christian surrounding. His argument is based on subscriptions which name late antique Roman aristocrats and which are found in the manuscripts of many Latin classics that senatorial households had transcribed from papyrus scrolls to the parchment codices which monasteries preserved.⁷²

Despite its pervasive currency, the notion of a pagan revival in Rome at the turn of the fifth century has been questioned. Neither the notion of a close-knit circle nor their pagan direction is believed anymore today. Alan Cameron, in particular, has qualified this assumption, forwarding the idea that exactly these books survived because they were valuable luxury codices.⁷³ He argued that senators engaged in preserving the literary patrimony did not do so from strong religious motivations and indeed had often already been Christianised since the beginning of the fifth century. In fact, he suggests that Christians rather than pagans made extensive use of these subscriptions. It is therefore more correct to say that the subscriptions that came into use in the fourth century have already been linked to Christian book production and undeniably reflect the high social status of subscribers.⁷⁴

Pöhlmann is closer to Bloch's position when in his history of text transmission, he argues that the classical heritage was preserved because senators (and upper-class people elsewhere) were exempt from Christian censorship.⁷⁵ However, subscriptions account for the Christian canonisation of texts rather than pagan preservation efforts. Nevertheless, Alan Cameron provides an interesting exception in a mathematical text which gives the names of late antique pagans

71 Macr. Sat. 6.9.9: *nam quia saeculum nostrum ab Ennio et omni bibliotheca vetere descivit, multa ignoramus, quae non laterent si veterum lectio nobis esset familiaris*. Cf. Bloch (1963), 213; Alan Cameron (2011), 251, who concludes that archaic authors were neglected in favour of Silver Latin authors. On the date, religion and identity of Macrobius, see recently Alan Cameron (2011), 231–72.

72 Bloch (1963); Jahn (1851); more recently Hedrick (2000); and see recently Alan Cameron (2011), esp. 399–526. The best known subscription reads *Victorinus v.c. emendabam domnis Symmachis*, found in manuscripts at the end of each of Livy's first 10 books.

73 Alan Cameron (2011), 423, 455–6.

74 Alan Cameron (1977); Alan Cameron (1984). And most recently, Alan Cameron (2011), esp. 492–7.

75 Pöhlmann (1994), 97–8.

(like the Alexandrian scholar Theon and his daughter Hypatia). Similar subscriptions are also found in earlier texts such as in an old copy of Epicurus' *De rerum natura*, found among the Herculaneum papyri, which indicate the above-average care for correctness of these texts and perhaps the specifically pagan interest for texts on mathematics, astronomy and natural philosophy.⁷⁶ At any rate, it is important to note that in the Latin West these Christian subscriptions are linked to the successful preservation of the accompanying text. This indicates that a text survived because of Christian approval.

Underpinning this trend towards canonisation is a colophon which Irenaeus of Lyons in the second century added to the end of his book and which is quoted and endorsed by Eusebius, Jerome and Rufinus:⁷⁷

I adjure you who transcribe this book, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by his glorious advent when he will judge both the living and the dead, to transcribe, collate and correct it very carefully against the master-copy from which you have transcribed it; similarly, you should also transcribe this oath, as you have found it in the master-copy.

The colophon displays eschatological ideas proscribing how a Christian religious text should be transcribed. In Irenaeus' case, the addendum appears to be a determined effort to make sure that he will be judged deservedly according to his writings at Judgment Day, and by avoiding scribal errors that would otherwise give the impression that his writings lack doctrinal canonicity.

It has been assumed that Cassiodorus rescued much of Latin classical literature,⁷⁸ but this belief is no longer given wide credence. The wealthy senator Cassiodorus (sixth century) was among the early initiators of monastic book production in the West. Cassiodorus collected books in Italy, Africa and for many years he lived in Constantinople, which preserved the classical tradition more than any other city. Early research on the surviving copies of pagan Latin texts identified the senatorial circle in Rome, originating with the late fourth-century senator Symmachus and terminating with sixth-century senatorial authors such as Boethius and Cassiodorus, as the common source for the transmission of many such texts.⁷⁹ However, not much is known about the fate of Cassiodorus'

⁷⁶ Alan Cameron (2011), 424–7 with 469–97.

⁷⁷ Hier. vir. ill. 35: *adiuro te qui transcribis librum istum, per dominum nostrum Iesum Christum et per gloriosum eius adventum quo iudicaturus est vivos et mortuos, ut conferas, postquam transcripseris, et emendes illum ad exemplar unde transcripsisti, diligentissime; hanc quoque obtestationem similiter transferas, ut invenisti in exemplari*. Eus. h.e. 5.20.2 (and the translation by Rufinus), Rufin. *de principiis*, pr. 3 = Hier. *ep.* 80.3. See Alan Cameron (2011), 470 (translation).

⁷⁸ Momigliano (1951), 210–17.

⁷⁹ Jahn (1851); Bloch (1963); Reynolds and Wilson (1991), 42–3.

library in the monastery of Vivarium, although it is assumed its books were received first in Rome and the monastery of Bobbio and eventually beyond the Alps.⁸⁰ In his *Institutiones*, Cassiodorus gives summaries and titles of books in his possession, in what Hagendahl has called “the first medieval library catalogue.”⁸¹ These titles scarcely exceed the amount of ancient Latin titles extant today.⁸² The evidence, therefore, suggests that ancient Latin literature suffered its greatest loss certainly before the sixth century (perhaps much earlier).⁸³

In sum, Ammianus blames the decline of literature to changing interests, yet without overtly specifying that Christianity is causing this change, he subtly alludes to the current religious policy creating an atmosphere detrimental to the survival and promotion of pagan literatures associated with magic. In the context of this book, this is important because it shows that these literatures were actually neglected and that the reason for this was the religious atmosphere. It can therefore be argued that this neglect was due to censorship of books, but this does not mean that there was any attempt to ban classical literature in general.

5.4 The Jerome–Rufinus Controversy

Given the evidence examined so far, it is not implausible that librarians physically removed books they disliked from libraries. At any rate, monasteries gave the greatest care to preserve the works of ecclesiastical authorities and followed their recommendations, given at a time when doctrinal controversies within Christianity were at their peak. Speyer has therefore argued that the following letter by Jerome may have had some impact on scribal decisions not to copy offensive classical texts in later centuries. To my mind, it is more important to read this passage as a testimonial for the way in which Christian scribes, in Jerome’s very own age or shortly after, decided which books or passages of a text to copy and which books or passages not to copy. In the letter, and borrowing from a similar interpretation given by Origen,⁸⁴ Jerome compares the fate of pagan tenets in ancient, secular literature to that of a captive woman in the Old Testament. Christians, he argues, should avoid pagan literature just like a captive woman.

80 See Lapidge (2006), 18–20; O’Donnell (1975), 222–3. Troncarelli (1998) rejected Vivarium as the origin of some manuscripts containing classical texts.

81 Hagendahl (1983), 111.

82 Titles are listed in Mynors (1937), 184–93.

83 Ward (2000).

84 Orig. *hom.* 7 in Lev. 6 (GCS 29, Orig. 6, 390–91).

However, if the captor desires her because of her beauty, she needs to be thoroughly cleansed before marriage (21.13.8–9):⁸⁵

We are also used to do that when we read the philosophers, when the books of secular wisdom come into our hands. If we find anything useful in these, we convert it to our own doctrine, but if we find anything superfluous – concerning idols, love, the care for secular knowledge – these things we scrape off, for these we decree baldness, these we cut off like finger nails with a very sharp blade.

Speyer puts this forward to show where monastic scribes may have got the idea to delete problematic, lascivious lines from manuscripts that contain poetry.⁸⁶ Yet despite its drastic wording, Jerome's letter also reveals that a strategy of appropriation existed, allowing for the classical heritage to be absorbed in the Christian era. To my mind, Jerome is alluding to philosophical texts, such as those written by Plato, rather than to poetry. Hitherto this passage has not been read alongside a similar verdict on the part of Jerome's adversary Rufinus:⁸⁷

With your censor's rod⁸⁸ and by your own arrogant authority, you announce: 'This book should be banned from libraries, that book should be included; [...] This author should be regarded as Catholic, even though he seems to have erred in quite a few things; that author should have no mercy for his error.'

Rufinus, his adversary in the Origenist controversy of the 390s, accuses Jerome of power abuse because he applied selfish, arbitrary rules when judging which books to ban from libraries. However, the critical thrust is of a polemical nature, as Jerome was not actually in charge of library reforms. It is known that Jerome at that time was in Palestine and had no authority over libraries. In context, Ru-

⁸⁵ Hier. ep. 21.13: *atqui et nos hoc facere solemus, quando philosophos legimus, quando in manus nostras libri veniunt sapientiae saecularis: si quid in eis utile repperimus, ad nostrum dogma convertimus, si quid vero superfluum, de idolis, de amore, de cura saecularium rerum, haec radimus, his calvitium indicimus, haec in unguium morem ferro acutissimo desecamus*; referring to Deut. 21:11–14.

⁸⁶ Speyer (1981), 139 with 106 gives the examples of Ausonius, Juvenal and the Latin Anthology.

⁸⁷ Rufin. apol. adv. Hier. 2.34 (CCSL 20:109): *tua autem illa censoria virgula et arroganti auctoritate decernis: ille arceatur a bibliothecis, ille recipiatur ... Hic autem catholicus habeatur, etiam si in aliquantis videatur errasse; illi erroris venia non detur.*

⁸⁸ *Censoria virgula* is another word for *obelus*, a line marking content as not authentic or suspicious: Quint. inst. 1.4.3; Hier. ep. 50.4, 80.7; 84.7: *cum hoc reieceritis et quasi censoria virgula separaveritis a fide ecclesiae, tuto legam cetera nec venena iam metuum, cum antidotum praebibero.*

finus criticises Jerome's verdict to reject the works of the martyr Pamphilus because they are of dubious authenticity. Rufinus' claim that Jerome was expelling books from libraries can therefore be taken as a metaphor for judging their orthodoxy, something which nevertheless could stigmatise a book as being heretical and make it unlikely to be transmitted or received in libraries because of Jerome's authority.

Jerome himself alludes to this quality in a letter addressed to Vigilantius, who also became his opponent. While claiming the same authority for himself, Jerome raises this rhetorical question: "Are you the only one allowed, with your very wise head, to pass sentence upon all Greek and Latin writers, as it were with your censor's rod to eject some from libraries and to admit others?"⁸⁹ He notes that he himself has omitted unorthodox passages from his Latin translation of works by Origen while criticising that Vigilantius kept copies of Origen's treatise on Job. In these he notes that "while discoursing against the devil and concerning the stars and the sky, he has said certain things which the Church does not receive."⁹⁰ This circumstantial allusion nevertheless indicates the value and importance of natural philosophy to Christianity's doctrinal interests. It is particularly noteworthy as it highlights the degree to which rival Christian authors struggled for power among each other by attempting to define what books (including their own) were permitted in libraries. In doing this, neither Rufinus nor Jerome explicitly mention pagan books and it appears that the focus of their debate was on Christian books that deviated from accepted orthodoxies rather than a concerted effort to push certain pagan texts into a terminal decline. However, passages like these still account for the fact that texts opposed to Christian orthodoxy were deliberately left behind.

In the next section, I shall briefly outline some of the attitudes that Christian ecclesiastical or lay authors displayed towards pagan literatures in general. As we have just seen, Christian authors, such as Jerome, were aware that their authority could mean that some books were preserved in libraries, while others were not. Therefore, we can observe that these attitudes towards pagan literatures had a significant impact on the preservation of ancient literatures.

⁸⁹ Hier. ep. 61.2: *tibi soli licet, τῷ σοφωτάτῳ κρανίῳ, de cunctis et Graecis et Latinis tractatoribus ferre sententiam et quasi censoria virgula alios eicere de bibliothecis, alios recipere.*

⁹⁰ Hier. ep. 61.2: *contra diabolum et de stellis caeloque disputans quaedam locutus est, quae ecclesia non recipit?*

5.5 Christianity and Classical Literature

It is well known that Christian ecclesiastical authors often wrote about pagan and classical authors in a negative way. Of course there was no general agreement on the question of whether Christians should continue to study the classics. The fourth and fifth centuries are of particular importance as Christianity necessarily needed to become increasingly open to individuals that had received a rhetorical education. Indeed, many Christian ecclesiastical authors argued that it was an important conversion strategy to show that many of the ancient authors and philosophers had put forward views similarly to those found in the Bible. In this section, we will see a number of strategies that Christian authors employed to exempt classical literature from demonisation despite the fact that these texts frequently mention pagan gods. We will also see that other texts were actually attributed to a demonical counter-world and that there are reasons to believe that this differentiation had an impact on the survival of pagan literatures.

The prime example of a Christian ecclesiastical author relatively tolerant of classical literature is Basil of Caesarea (c. 330 – 379). In his much discussed treatise *Address to Young Men on the Right Use of Greek Literature*, Basil raised the question of to what extent young Christians should receive education in pagan literature. He employed the metaphor of bees collecting honey to suggest how Christians can take advantage of classical literature. Scholars have taken this treatise as the prime reason for why Christian readers in the East did not reject the classics.⁹¹ Fourth-century Christian authors, such as Basil and Jerome, had received a rhetorical education before their conversion. This education had shaped them intellectually to the point where they continued to quote classical works even as bishops.⁹² Unlike many earlier Christian authors they were themselves members of an educated elite.

This was not always unproblematic. In a dream, Jerome was haunted by God torturing him for someone who preferred Cicero and Plautus to reading the Bible. Criticising the luxurious life-style of Roman society as opposed to monastic life, he passionately vowed “Lord, if ever again I possess secular books, or if ever again I read such, I have denied you.”⁹³ Jerome’s allusion to Peter’s denial of Jesus after the Last Supper is significant, as it places reading such texts on a par with this act. Jerome did not adhere to his promise, however. The monk Rufinus of Aquileia became Jerome’s adversary in the Origenist controversy and he

⁹¹ Klein (1997).

⁹² Jerome complains about bishops and presbyters still teaching secular, particularly dramatic, texts: Hier. in Eph. 3.6.4 (PL 26:574A).

⁹³ Hier. ep. 22.30: *Domine, si unquam habuero codices saeculares, si legero, te negavi.*

publicly repudiated Jerome for not living up to this standard, claiming that Jerome continued to quote Cicero, Vergil, Horace, and even books by Pythagoras otherwise considered lost.⁹⁴ This is significant because, if correct, it means that books by Pythagoras (or perhaps more likely by Pythagorean philosophers) were still circulating at that time. In his defence of this charge, Jerome declared he had in fact quoted such passages merely because he had memorised them during the rhetorical education he received. He implausibly went on to suggest that he never returned to classical texts following his education, turning the tables on Rufinus by alleging that he had studied Cicero “in secret” in order to gain a reputation of being eloquent.⁹⁵ Their correspondence represents the hostile attitudes of monastic communities towards the classical heritage.

Lay Christians had a far more relaxed attitude towards rhetorical training. A passage by Socrates Scholasticus is the *locus classicus* showing that Christian lay authors of the East were appreciative of classical literature. In Constantinople of the first half of the fifth century – a centre for classical learning in the east –, the Church historian Socrates gave a list of reasons as to why Christians should make use of Greek education. This can be summarized as follows: it was neither recognised nor entirely rejected by Jesus and the apostles; some philosophers came close to Christianity and opposed the Epicureans and other schools; and Greek education ultimately is helpful for Christians to refute adversaries with their own weapons. To accomplish the latter, it is necessary to engage with the former, Socrates suggests. Where extremist Christians put forward the opinion that Greek *paideia* is pernicious because it “teaches polytheism”, Socrates thus argues that contemporaries appreciated Greek *paideia*.⁹⁶ Socrates’ line of argument nonetheless shows that he felt it necessary to defend classical education from clerical reproaches.

Some Greek ecclesiastical authors shared similar attitudes. The works of Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria (412–444), contain a number of typical motifs with which Christian ecclesiastical authors intended to appropriate the classical heritage to the contemporary Christian reader. For example, several times Cyril refers to Greek literature and philosophy metaphorically as the spoils of gold and silver which the Israelites took out of Egypt.⁹⁷ While Cyril rejected ancient materialist philosophy, his disdain for classical authors (still being studied)

⁹⁴ Rufin. *apol. adv. Hier.* 2.7. See Speyer (1981), 125.

⁹⁵ Hier. *contra Ruf.* 1.30: *aut ego fallor, aut tu Ciceronem occulte lectitas et ideo tam disertus es.* See also Hier. *ep.* 70 and Jeffrey (1996), 74–9.

⁹⁶ Socr. *h.e.* 3.16(.8): πρὸς βλάβης γὰρ εἶναι τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν παιδείαν πολυθεῖαν διδάσκουσαν.

⁹⁷ Cyr. *ador.* 1 (PG 68:204D–205B), 5 (PG 68:361D); in *Joel* 2.3.39 (PG 71:393B); in *Zachariam* 3.9.53 (PG 72:137D); 6.14.108 (PG 72:264B).

was less harsh; he occasionally quoted classical authors, but mostly in order to add authority to his claims beyond citing biblical works.

Within this context of endorsing classical authors, Cyril refers particularly to Homer in order to appropriate classical texts for the Christian reader. Although Homer is positioned as “not quite remote from the dancers on the stage” (which were often despised because of their low social status), it is conceded that he had introduced the literary theme of battling virtues and vices (a Christian theme elaborated by Prudentius). In the field of physics, however, Homer had sung about the clash of elements, while also speaking of “god himself” instead of “someone of the gods.” Cyril takes this latter point as an indication for Homer being “not entirely ignorant of the truth.”⁹⁸ Similarly, Cyril elsewhere quotes and summarizes passages on creation from Hesiod in order to show their lack of clarity and both engagements can be taken as a sign of his genuine interest in classical culture.⁹⁹

While some Christian authors therefore held classical texts in high regard, others considered ancient literary traditions as potentially harmful. John Chrysostom wrote a pedagogical treatise, arguing that the “fables” (*mýthoi*), the material of ancient poetry such as the story of Jason and the Fleece, should be removed from child education.¹⁰⁰ He also suggests that as these things excite sexual feelings particularly during puberty, the child needs to be taught that hell-fire follows sexual indulgence to curb these feelings or any attempt to act on them.¹⁰¹ John therefore proposes an educational strategy similar to those employed in the educational training that monks and ascetics received, as we have already seen. However, there is also an acceptance in John’s work that upper-class people are likely to have come into contact with Greek *paideia* following their childhood education. Although he criticises *paideia* for its non-accordance with Christian teaching, he himself possessed this higher education and he appears to attach some value to it.¹⁰² Indeed, as early Christian educational pedagogy according to John was deeply concerned with fortifying the child against later temptation, in a sermon given in Constantinople John sug-

⁹⁸ Cyr. *Juln.* 1.36–7, at 37 (= PG 76:541D–544C, at 544B, C): οὐκ ἡγνοηκότα παντελῶς εὐρήσμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ... θεὸς αὐτός ... θεῶν τις.

⁹⁹ Cyr. *Juln.* 2.25 (= PG 76:581C–D).

¹⁰⁰ Chrys. *educ. lib.* 3, 28, 34, 38–9. Similarly, *hom.* 21 in *Eph.* 1–2 (PG 62:150–51); *hom.* 1 in *Mt.* 1 (PG 57:13–14); cf. Maxwell (2006), 98–104.

¹⁰¹ Chrys. *educ. lib.* 2–3.

¹⁰² Chrys. *educ. lib.* 18; cf. *Hom.* 3 in *Jo.* 1 (PG 59:37).

gests that classical *paideia* may be suitable to provide illustrative examples of ancient misfortunes.¹⁰³

Attitudes in the West were no different. Augustine's four books *De doctrina Christiana* (mostly written in 396/7 and finished in 426/7) became a landmark guide for the West on how Christians should deal with the ancient literary heritage. *De doctrina Christiana* was primarily a handbook for bishops and priests, providing guidance on how they were to be trained.¹⁰⁴ It was in line with the council of Carthage of 398, which prohibited bishops to read pagan books (*libros gentilium*) and permitted to read heretical books in exceptional cases only.¹⁰⁵ It has been argued that these books were written specifically for contemporary monasticism which was radically hostile against ancient education.¹⁰⁶ But it is also apparent that Augustine justified the Christian appropriation of ancient authors. Similarly to Cyril, he makes specific reference to the Israelites taking jewels of gold and silver from Egypt and the Egyptians but leaving behind the idols and burdens – a clear metaphor for Christians selecting ancient material that accorded with and supported the Bible.¹⁰⁷ Generally, however, Augustine assigned Christian and biblical rather than classical authors to be studied in rhetorical education as canonical authors.¹⁰⁸ The dual nature of rhetoric is also important in his writings. Rhetoric is useful to disseminate Christian doctrine and to refute enemies.¹⁰⁹ Thus Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*, although far from accounting for the end of education, does so – it seems – in what amounts to denying the transmission of classical texts in schools, programmatically at least; but it has also rightfully been argued that he actually opened up a path for their legitimate survival.¹¹⁰

103 Chrys. *hom. 1 in 2 Thess. 2* (PG 62:472): “Read, if you want, both our own works and those of the pagans; for they are also filled with such examples. If you disdain ours from laziness; if you admire the works of philosophers, go even to them. They will teach you about ancient misfortunes, as will poets, orators, sophists and all historians”: ἀνάγνωθι, εἰ βούλει, καὶ τὰ παρ’ ἡμῖν, καὶ τὰ ἔξωθεν (καὶ γὰρ καὶ ἐκεῖνα γέμει τούτων τῶν παραδειγμάτων), εἰ τῶν ἡμετέρων καταφρονεῖς ἐξ ἀπονίας· εἰ τὰ τῶν φιλοσόφων θαυμάζεις, κἄν τούτοις πρόσιθι· ἐκεῖνοί σε διδάξουσι, συμφορὰς παλαιὰς διηγούμενοι, καὶ ποιηταί, καὶ ῥήτορες, καὶ σοφισταί, καὶ λογογράφοι πάντες. Perhaps written in 402. See Mayer (2005), 196–7.

104 Pollmann (1996), 70–71.

105 *Collectio Hispana* (Conc. Carthag. 4) can. 16 (CCSL 149:345) = *stat. eccl. ant. can.* 5 (CCSL 148:167): *ut episcopi libros gentilium non legant, haereticorum autem pro necessitate et tempore.*

106 Prinz (1980), 59–67; Pollmann (1996), 76–80.

107 Aug. *doctr. christ.* 2.40.60; Exod. 3:21–2; 11:2; 12:35–6; Orig. *ep.* 2.2.

108 Aug. *doctr. christ.* 4.3.4; 4.5.8.

109 Aug. *doctr. christ.* 2.42.63; 2.40.61; 4.2.3; Krämer (2007), 109–14, 141–4, 151–9; cf. Ge-meinhardt (2007), 340–49.

110 Cf. Kaster (1997), 15; Chin (2005), 181–2.

Augustine's *On Cathechising the Uninstructed* (c. 400) is another important text on the practice of Christian religious instruction as it suggests that coercion involves monitoring reading interests. Augustine here gives advice on how to inquire potential converts. If the missionaries get in touch with people well-educated in the liberal arts, they should interrogate them about the books they either possess or have previously read. The missionaries then should praise canonical books, particularly biblical ones, and criticise other authors:¹¹¹

And when he has told us this and if these books are known to us, or at least if we heard that according to the tradition of the Church, they were composed by some Catholic man of note, then we should gladly approve them. But if he has fallen victim to the volumes of some heretic and, unknowingly perhaps, remembers and considers something to be Catholic what the true faith condemns, we must diligently instruct him, setting before him the authority of the universal Church.

This shows that the converts were advised to get rid of their heretical books. These books may have involved pagan books opposed to the Christian world view because the potential converts were well-educated pagans. At any rate, they were likely to be harassed if they came up with any thoughts contrary to Church doctrines. For example, in the *City of God* Augustine refers to contemporary pagans that he intends to refute, just as some of them were themselves preparing a refutation against him:¹¹²

When I had published the first three of these books and they had come into the hands of many, I heard that certain persons were preparing against them a written reply of one kind or another. Then, it was reported to me that that they had already written it, but were seeking a time when they could publish it without danger. I admonish these persons not to desire what is not helpful for them.

Augustine takes the tack that their biased vanity is opposed to the truth of Augustine's discourse, proposing to tear out their 'most impudent garrulity' and suggesting that they would be much happier if they 'were not allowed to do

111 Aug. *catech. rud.* 8.12: *quod cum dixerit, tum si nobis noti sunt illi libri, aut ecclesiastica fama saltem accepimus a catholico aliquo memorabili viro esse conscriptos, laeti approbemus. si autem in alicuius haeretici volumina incurrit et nesciens forte quod vera fides improbat, tenuit animo et catholicum esse arbitrat: sedulo edocendus est, praelata auctoritate universalis ecclesiae...*

112 Aug. *civ.* 5.26 (CCSL 47:163): *quorum tres priores cum edidissem et in multorum manibus esse coepissent, audiui quosdam nescio quam adversus eos responsionem scribendo praeparare. deinde ad me perlatum est, quod iam scripserint, sed tempus quaerant, quo sine periculo possint edere. quos admoneo, non optent quod eis non expedit.*

this at all'. Nevertheless, he concedes that in consultations with theologians people can voice their different opinions and listen to them in order to be corrected.¹¹³

Augustine deals explicitly with the subject of censorship of poetry in two major sections of the *City of God*. Explicating his point that sexually offensive poetry should not be read,¹¹⁴ Augustine argues that theatrical performances encourage sexual indulgence contrary to Christian morals and that in this regard they are thus comparable to mystical rites. He blames their origin on the wickedness of the pagan demons, while conceding that comedy and tragedy, although they also contain many shameful things, are more tolerable than other performances. Augustine also says that young students are still forced to study dramatic texts, perhaps in allusion to his own school days, indicating the continuation of classical studies in North Africa.¹¹⁵

Firstly, Augustine refers to Cicero's opinion in his work *On the State*. It is not firmly known whether or not Augustine misrepresented Cicero's view as the relevant sections of Cicero's *On the State* are lost today, but there is reason to believe, as I shall argue shortly, that he was at best loosely based on ancient authorities in this regard. Cicero's work is important because it was a pioneering work on state theory in Latin classical literature. Summarising Cicero, Augustine thus argues the ancient Romans had never been appreciative of poetical license as much as the Greeks had been, but rather than allowing living persons to be satirised, they had, in the archaic Law of the Twelve Tables, ruled capital punishment to "anyone who had performed or composed a poem in order to bring infamy or disgrace on someone else."¹¹⁶ Moreover, he comments, Cicero had credited the great Roman statesman Scipio with approving the ancient practice that persons involved in theatrical shows, such as actors, should be allowed neither to hold offices nor to vote.¹¹⁷ Augustine therefore used Cicero's classical text to argue that the ideal Christian state should be restrictive of poetical licence.

113 Aug. civ. 5.26 (CCSL 47:163): *garrulitate inpudentissima ... multo erit felicior, si hoc illi omnino non liceat ... contradicere*. In two letters, Augustine wanted to persuade his correspondents to give up opinions opposed to orthodoxy. In one case he refused to send his requested sixth book on music (ep. 101), in the other he discouraged one Consentius to publish his theological book (ep. 119–20).

114 Aug. civ. 6.5–8.

115 Aug. civ. 2.8; cf. 2.11; 7.26; Aug. conf. 1.14.

116 Aug. civ. 2.9 (CCSL 47:41): *si quis occentavisset sive carmen condidisset, quod infamiam faceret flagitiumve alteri* = Cic. rep. 4.12 Ziegler = Leg. XII tab. fr. 8.1 Crawford.

117 Aug. civ. 2.13 (CCSL 47:44): *non solum ei nullus ad honorem dabatur locus, verum etiam censoris nota tribum tenere propriam minime sinebatur*.

Secondly, Augustine quotes the example of Plato in *On the State* in order to further discuss whether or not poets are to be considered as infamous as actors (who were of low social status) in Christian society. Augustine largely endorses Plato, who allegedly argues that “they should be expelled from the city as enemies of the truth.” However, as Plato had only literally written this concerning the pantomimes he is somewhat erroneously reproduced here, although Augustine may have read the Greek text and Plato did indeed write that the youth should be protected from some problematic, imitative pieces of poetry such as Homeric battle-scenes.¹¹⁸ In regard to the quotations from Cicero, Augustine writes that he abbreviated and altered the text “to make it easier to understand”,¹¹⁹ but in the case of Plato it is obvious that he has somewhat misrepresented the original text to fit his argument and his conclusions.

Yet, he does not denounce those (recent) poets who allegedly predicted the advent of Christ and argued against other gods.¹²⁰ This statement is interesting because Augustine could well have been thinking of Vergil, without mentioning him, because Vergil allegedly predicted the birth of Christ. Although Augustine generally disapproves of pagan poetry, his exemption of Vergil from this verdict is a recurring theme. Indeed, in Augustine’s works Vergil is the poet quoted most often, frequently in non-polemical contexts, although Augustine always stressed the unbridgeable gap between Vergil’s values and that of the Christian society.¹²¹

The verdict on books about Roman religion was far less favourable. Having established the link between pagan poetry and religion, Augustine dedicates a section of book six to suggesting that knowledge of Roman religion should be choked off in Christian society. Explicating this point, Augustine draws on the ancient authority of Varro in order to show that the opinions of pagans on the subject of the afterlife are erroneous.¹²² As with the case of pagan philosophy, constructions of the afterlife were a prime concern for Christian authors. Augustine’s use of Varro for his purpose is revealing. If his work was still extant Varro would be the ultimate authority for reconstructing Roman religion today. But Augustine is the last author who is known to have had access to his work. (Similar

118 Aug. civ. 2.14 (CCSL 47:45): *tamquam adversarios veritatis poetas censuit urbe pellendos*; based on Pl. r. 3.398a. See Sorabij (1983), 235. Passages on censorship of poetry: Pl. r. 3.377b–417b (on Homer, e.g. 378d, 379d, 383a).

119 Aug. civ. 2.9 (CCSL 47:41): *haec ex Ciceronis quarto de Republica libro ad verbum excerpenda arbitratus sum, nonnullis, propter faciliorem intellectum, vel praetermissis, vel paululum commutatis*.

120 Aug. civ. 18.23.

121 McCormack (1998), esp. 230.

122 Aug. civ. 6.1–2.

things can be said about Cicero's pioneering work *On the State* that was deleted and overwritten with a text authored by Augustine, in an early-medieval monastery as we will see in the final chapter). Generally, Augustine argues that the religious institutions of the past are inspired by unclean demons which inspire men with "noxious opinions."¹²³ It is thus likely that it got lost soon after. I therefore suggest that Augustine's discourse explains why Christian institutions thought it inappropriate to preserve this work, namely because it attempted to preserve the demonical knowledge of Roman religion.

Augustine's attitudes towards knowledge of Roman religion inform his polemical discourse of pagan historical accounts. Thus in book 18 Augustine cites the Bible, according to which the world is no older than 6,000 years altogether. In Augustine's opinion, the truth of the Bible is evident because the "historians" (*historici*) have recorded contradictory accounts whereas the Bible offers one. True Christians, he suggests, do not believe these authors and may not even read them as uncritical readers of pagan historians are the descendants of the people of Babylon:¹²⁴

Moreover, the citizens of the ungodly city, scattered everywhere throughout the earth, read the most learned authors, whose authority can apparently not be condemned, although these authors disagree among themselves concerning events most remote from the memory of our own age, and they cannot find out whom they should more likely trust. We, by contrast, are grounded in the history of our religion by divine authority and strongly believe that anything contrary to it is entirely false, no matter what differences there are in secular books, which, whether true or false, contribute nothing of moment to living a right and blessed life.

Ancient historians, he notes on the other hand, are useful for proving that contemporary arguments against Christianity are untrue. They have worth as a means for hoisting the enemy with their own petard. Augustine himself uses this strategy when he quotes ancient authorities in order to persuade his audience that the Roman Republic was no better than the present age, despite all recent military setbacks.¹²⁵

¹²³ Aug. civ. 6.4 (CCSL 47:169): *noxias opiniones*.

¹²⁴ Aug. civ. 18.40 (CCSL 48:635): *porro autem cives impiae civitatis diffusi usquequaque per terras cum legunt doctissimos homines, quorum nullius contemnenda videatur auctoritas, inter se de rebus gestis ab aetatis nostrae memoria remotissimis discrepantes, cui potius credere debeant, non inveniunt. nos vero in nostrae religionis historia fulti auctoritate divina, quicquid ei resistit, non dubitamus esse falsissimum, quomodolibet sese habeant cetera in saecularibus litteris, quae seu vera seu falsa sint, nihil momenti adferunt, quo recte beateque vivamus*.

¹²⁵ Aug. civ. 21.8 (CCSL 48:771): in the context of the likelihood of bodies burning eternally in hellfire without being consumed, "we must produce from the writings of their own most learned

Finally, Augustine also criticises the Roman state for insufficient censorship measures, approving of the few cases where the early Roman state actually burnt books. In the seventh book, he mentions that the senate in 181 BC ordered books allegedly written by the archaic Roman king Numa to be burnt. Drawing from Varro's account, Augustine concludes that Numa "by an unlawful curiosity" was inspired by demons to write down the causes for Roman rites, but decided to bury these books (which were allegedly influenced by Pythagorean philosophy) as he was worried that either their dangerous content became known if published or the demons would rage against him if he had destroyed these books. This again shows that people like Augustine believed that books contained demons. Augustine seems to be sympathetic with the senate's decision to burn these books, arguing that "human curiosity" would otherwise have been tempted to search for these books since the matter had already been divulged.¹²⁶

Similarly to Augustine, the works of the Christian poet Prudentius (early fifth century) contain a number of statements that disapprove of certain literary genres and art forms. However, as to the content used in his poetry, it is to Prudentius' aesthetic and literary merit to have elaborated, and so appropriated, classical motifs, while other Christian poets (such as Proba, Juvenius and Sedulius) largely kept on versifying biblical or early Christian prose. Prudentius also pleaded for preservation of pagan statues as works of art.¹²⁷ In one of his hymns the martyr Romanus appeals to the reader to take responsibility for what he is reading, framing this as a discourse between martyr and persecutor:¹²⁸

You say the poets fabricate these tales, but they are themselves devoted, as much as you, to such mystic cults, and they worship what they describe. Why do you find such pleasure in reading of sin?

The end of the Romanus hymn draws an extensive picture of Judgment Day, featuring Romanus' rewards and the punishment of sinners. In this, Prudentius'

authorities some instances to show that this is possible" (*de litteris eorum, qui doctissimi apud illos fuerunt, aliquid proferendum est, quo appareat posse fieri*). On the moral vices of the Roman Republic, Aug. civ. 2.18–21.

126 Aug. civ. 7.34 (CCSL 47:214): *curiositate inlicita ... humana curiositas*, and see 7.35; Speyer (1981), 166; earlier sources for the burning of Numa's books include Liv. 39.16.9; 40.29.11; Val. Max. 1.1.12.

127 Prud. c.Symm. 1.501–5; Callu (1981), 247–9. cf. Döpp (1986), 67–70; Gniska (1993), vol. 2:146–8; Gniska (1991), 33–40.

128 Prud. perist. 10.216–19: *dicis licenter haec poetas fingere, | sed sunt et ipsi talibus mysterioris | tecum dicati quodque describunt colunt. | Tu cur piaculum tam libenter lectitas?*

narrative is close to a similarly eschatological passage of Paulinus of Nola, who warned in one of his poems that the end is near and therefore: “the true oracles warn everyone to believe in the sacred books mentioned, and to prepare themselves for God.”¹²⁹ This latter point is also mirrored in Prudentius’ poem *Apotheosis*, which suggests that people should now read the right things with reference to the Second Coming of Christ. In Prudentius’ rhetoric, not only have Bibles largely replaced other books, but also the Bibles are new (transcribed) books: “For what literature now does not contain Christ? What book-case is not filled with the praise of Christ, celebrating his miracles in new books?”¹³⁰ Prudentius intends to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity and was likely aware that at this time the Bible has not replaced other books as much as he wants us to think. This passage also presents a possible hint that old Latin translations of biblical books were replaced with a new canonical version, perhaps alluding to the Vulgate, written by Jerome at the end of the fourth century. By implication, this suggests that uncanonical texts were unlikely to be transcribed – an ideologically and authoritatively endorsed selection process that comes close to modern understandings of censorship. Older versions of the Bible, however, continued to circulate for centuries to come.

Despite the polemical thrust of this position, Prudentius elsewhere directly argues for the preservation of the work of the pagan senator Symmachus, his enemy against whom he wrote the two books *Contra Symmachum*, on condition that he himself is allowed to refute it: “Let his book rest unharmed, his excellent volume keep the fame it has earned by his flashing eloquence.”¹³¹ Whether a testament to Prudentius’ persuasiveness or the vagaries of history, much of Symmachus’ writing does, in fact, survive. Symmachus’ letters as well as the *Relationes*, written during his prefecture in 384/5 are extant. Posthumously edited by Symmachus’ son, the letters were probably then censored to suppress dangerous material.¹³² Cardinal Angelo Mai discovered and edited a palimpsest of Symmachus’ speeches in 1815. The original copy dates from before the mid of the sixth century.¹³³ The text was deleted probably in the seventh century and overwritten

129 Paul. Nol. *carm.* 31.405–6: *omnes vera monent sacris oracula libris | credere praedictis seque parare Deo*. Cf. Prud. *perist.* 10.1111–18.

130 Prud. *apoth.* 376–85: *nam quae iam littera Christum | non habet, aut quae non scriptorum armaria Christi | laude referta novis celebrant miracula libris?*

131 Prud. *c.Symm.* 1.648–9: *inlaesus maneat liber excellensque volumen | obtineat partam dicendi fulmine famam*.

132 Cf. Alan Cameron (2011), 39 and 167–8, 366–83, where he also argues that Symmachus could himself have revised and edited book one of the letter collection.

133 Mai (1815), xiii on the date of the lower script; Seeck (1883), viii.

with the *Acts of the Council of Chalcedon* of 451. The original codex contained other texts considered to be lost: letters from the second-century author Fronto (who wrote against Christianity) and Cicero's *opus maius* on the republic. There is some sense in Gnilka's reading of *volumen* as exclusively related to Symmachus' third *relatio* on the altar of Victory,¹³⁴ but Prudentius' plea, as we will see, could also be understood by monastic copyists as covering his works as a whole.

Prudentius does not then re-emerge until the early medieval period when the interest of monks in commentary scholarship saw a re-engagement with Prudentius' poetry. These glosses were originally penned probably between 650 and 750.¹³⁵ They are important for this book because they were written by monks and therefore give an insight into the attitudes of people who were in charge of copying books at a time for which little information is available.

The glosses do not suggest that those who carried them out had a specific untrammelled knowledge of the history of some 300 years before as the comments therein do not significantly surpass the level of elementary, non-informed scholarship. For example, Theodosius and Honorius, the emperors mentioned in the books *Contra Symmachum* are confused with Constantine. Their significance, however, is that the glossators read and understood some of the passages discussed as warnings against heretical literature. The eloquence of the snake that symbolizes Symmachus is explained as "heretical" and so too is its poisonous bite.¹³⁶ They therefore emphasise that the distinction between pagan and non-conformist Christian thoughts was void. This is an indication that the writings of important Christian authors of Late Antiquity which warned against subversive branches of pagan literature were taken seriously by those who made decisions about which texts to copy and which texts not to copy.

Having briefly explored the confluence between Christian and pre-Christian literary cultures, I have noted that while Christian ecclesiastical authors often criticised the classics, this does not mean that lay Christians agreed with this verdict. Nevertheless, the canon of classical authors clearly narrowed down in Late Antiquity compared to the Early Empire and according to established research there is little evidence of any interest in classical authors in Western Europe after the fifth century, as we will see in the next section.

¹³⁴ Gnilka (1993), vol. 2:20.

¹³⁵ See Burnam (1905), 3.

¹³⁶ Burnam (1905), 69, ad *C.Symm.* 1 pr. 75: *ELOQUII scilicet haereticorum*; ad *C.Symm.* 1 pr. 51: *MORSUM* haeresim; ad *C.Symm.* l.4, 9, 28; p. 79, ad 528: Constantine; ad 22. *TYRAN-NORUM antiquorum regum.* (Eugenius and Maximus).

5.6 Christianity and Paideia

As said before, it is likely that the transmission and preservation of ancient texts depended on the interest of readers in any given period. While changing interests or moral disapproval can neither be regarded as forms of censorship nor as sufficient reasons for anyone to destroy these texts, these factors could contribute to a general feeling that studying ancient texts was no longer helpful for a worldly or clerical career.

In consequence, and along with other important factors such as the political and economic decline of the Roman Empire, particularly in the West, books came to be neglected. Krüger has published a survey which shows that the production of books dropped significantly and that Christian texts replaced pagan ones during the fourth and fifth centuries. The survey was based on the 1,612 literary fragments from Oxyrhynchus in Egypt edited by this time. From literary fragments, 41 and 30 per cent date from the second and third centuries respectively, 7 per cent to the fourth and less to later centuries. The percentage of Christian fragments among literary papyri per century ranges from 0.9 in the second century to 8.2 in the third century, but suddenly changes to roughly 40 to 60 per cent from the fourth to seventh centuries each. During the same period, the amount of classical texts declined from more than 30 per cent to less than 5 per cent at the turn of the fourth century. The absolute figure of pagan texts then is very low compared to the early centuries. Krüger concluded that the figures are due to the early Christianisation of the city.¹³⁷ This coincides with poetic contests evidenced for Oxyrhynchus, a city with a strong literary tradition, only until the end of the third century.¹³⁸ Based on the papyrological material published at this time, Cavallo observed a further decline in the circulation of books, particularly of pagan content, after the reign of Justinian.¹³⁹

It is therefore pertinent that some Christian authors disapproved of certain literary genres and art forms. However, it is also important to stress that many of these forms that Christian authors criticised have not been unanimously accepted in the ancient world either. For example, because of their low social status mimes and actors were normally held in low esteem among classical, upper-class writers during the imperial period.

My aim in this section is to briefly address the question of how long classical texts continued to be studied after the Roman Empire became increasingly Chris-

137 Krüger (1990), 149–52, 260. And see Luijendijk (2010) on the trashing of Christian writings.

138 *POxy* 2338; see Alan Cameron (1965b), 485.

139 Cavallo (1978).

tianised in the fourth and fifth centuries, outlining recent research and a number of relevant sources on this subject. In order to do this, it is particularly important to analyse the meaning of *paideia* in late antique sources because this term has often been used by scholars to argue that Christians appreciated classical texts. It is also important to distinguish between different regions (Western Europe, North Africa where Latin was dominant and the Greek East) because these regions came to be increasingly independent when the Roman Empire fell apart in Late Antiquity. The aim of this section has implications on the book's general question of when and why Christian attitudes towards pagan literatures possibly affected the transmission of texts.

As said before, attitudes towards ancient literature and education in general were relatively ambiguous among Christian authors. In this context, much has been written on the relationship between Christianity and ancient education. To give a full survey of the range of attitudes of Christian authors towards classical literature is not the remit of this investigation. But studies indicate a continuation of *paideia* (education) in early Christianity despite the critical opinions of Christian authors. In this context, *paideia* is usually defined today as educational instruction in a range of authors accepted by pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity. Thus it appears that early Christian authors developed different strategies in order to appropriate ancient scholarship for the Christian reader.

Gemeinhardt recently published an important book on the subject of *Latin Christendom and Ancient Pagan Education*. Gemeinhardt's work has the merit of deepening our understanding of how Christian authors appropriated ancient education, specifically in the West, beyond the fifth century. However, to my mind, Gemeinhardt sometimes too easily presumes that when Christian sources mention education (or *paideia*) they were talking about classical rather than Christian authors or (at best) the knowledge derived from grammar books. More recently, Siniossoglou has rightfully emphasised that many Greek-speaking Christians in the East wrote about their education as quite opposed to the notion of education in ancient, pagan texts.¹⁴⁰ I will now discuss some relevant statements by diverse Christian (ecclesiastical or lay) authors regarding pagan literature and education.

In Christian texts *paideia* does not always mean education in the classics. For example, the apocryphal fourth-century *Acts of Philip* contain a fictitious speech to the Athenians, which commends Christianity to educated people but

¹⁴⁰ Siniossoglou (2008), 49–50, quoting Socr. *h.e.* 3.16.30–37, and 54. See Prostmeier (2005), too.

as very different from ancient education: “For my lord brought a *paideia* which is new and unknown into this world in order to devour all the *paideia* of the world.”¹⁴¹ Gemeinhardt reads this testimonial as “not abandoning the term and content of *paideia*.”¹⁴² Yet while the term itself indeed remains the same, the content of *paideia* is different here. More explicitly, the fourth-century *Recognitions*, a novel by Pseudo-Clement, pictures the apostle Peter as asserting that education (*eruditio liberalis*) is ruinous “if used for the errors of antiquity”, but very useful “for the dissemination of the true way.”¹⁴³ There is evidence for these claims also in non-fictitious texts. Bishop Lucifer of Cagliari in a speech to the emperor Constantius II (337–361), for example, wrote that Nicene Christians are “aloof from any knowledge of pagan literature”, but of course this is wishful thinking.¹⁴⁴ In the early fifth century, Eucherius of Lyon sought to persuade his correspondent to give up ancient philosophical for biblical readings.¹⁴⁵ In both passages criticism of studies outside of the Bible indicates that these studies actually continued. Similar attitudes can be traced throughout Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. This does not necessarily mean that the critics were hostile to this literature. Christians could criticise pagan literature because they felt to be dealing with a superior rather than an outdated enemy.

The same division emerges in the treatise *Contra Julianum* by Cyril of Alexandria. Answering the emperor Julian’s claim that children educated only in the Bible were no better than uneducated slaves when grown up, Cyril concedes that children raised as Christians do lack eloquence, yet, to be ascertained of the love of God is the only aim of Christian education. Christians learn all genres of virtue exclusively from the Bible,¹⁴⁶ although they use the words of the Greeks, “because we take advantage of that which is useful as a *propaedeuticum* to the true *paideia*.”¹⁴⁷ He goes on to say that because Christians did not practice the

141 A. Phil. 8(3) (Bonnet, 5): καὶ γὰρ παιδείαν ὄντως νέαν καὶ καινὴν ἤνεγκεν ὁ κύριός μου εἰς τὸν κόσμον, ἵνα πᾶσαν ἐξαλείψῃ κοσμικὴν παιδείαν.

142 Gemeinhardt (2007), 9.

143 Clem. *recogn.* 1.25.2: *si utamur in antiquitatis erroribus ... ad adserendum veritatem*; Gemeinhardt (2007), 334.

144 Lucif. *moriend.* 11 (CSEL 14:306): *alieni ab omnia scientia ethncalium litterarum, ad omnem destruendam haereselem valemus*. In a polemical speech against pagan philosophy, the early Christian author Tatian attributed each philosophical school its own *paideia*: Tat. *orat.* 27.1 (52.1–2) with Gemeinhardt (2007), 104–8, 428.

145 Eucher. *cont.* 408–9 (Pricoco, 84).

146 Cyr. *Juln.* 7 (PG 76:857D).

147 Cyr. *Juln.* 7 (PG 76:857D–860A). Cf. Regazzoni (1928), 87. Clem. *str.* 1.9.43.1–45.2, here 45.1 similarly speaks of Hellene learning as γυμνάσματα, cf. Orig. *Cels.* 6.13.10–12. Both authors, however, clearly have a more liberal view on such learning. Siniossoglou (2008), 51.

Hebrew language, they strip the Attic language they use of any pagan connotation, because Attic, like Hebrew, was created by God.¹⁴⁸ Cyril, therefore, uses the notion of *paideia* in a Christian understanding, as the true *paideia*.¹⁴⁹ Cyril's terminology of *paideia* matches that used by Julian, as Malley has indicated. Indeed, in several passages of Julian's writings, *paideia* is intrinsically tied to Hellenism.¹⁵⁰ Christians, on the other hand, have their own *paideia*, as education based on biblical texts.¹⁵¹ I agree with Malley who concluded that Julian felt Greek *paideia* to be endangered by this Christian *paideia*.¹⁵²

It is, then, a matter of ongoing debate how long classical literatures continued to be actively taught as well as actively studied. It would appear logical that if teachers did stop teaching classical authors after they converted to Christianity, then it would mean that these subjects would be taught less as more teachers converted. However, that Gemeinhardt argues "that Christian teachers did normally not replace classical authors with their own"¹⁵³ suggests that it is a difficult question to answer categorically. For example, an exercise book surviving from fourth-century Egypt shows that students penned the sign of the cross on each page to exorcise the names of gods used to learn the alphabet.¹⁵⁴ While this means that the students were likely to study the classics, it also points towards reservations regarding using pagan texts as curricular material in education because the Christian cross exorcised the students from any harmful effects. It is also known that classical texts were studied in Egypt throughout the Byzantine period (this is known for this region from papyri finds), but the canon of classical works narrowed down compared to the first three centuries AD, with Homer being the classical text most often attested.¹⁵⁵

The main evidence Gemeinhardt draws on to show that the classics were read in schools in Western Europe after the fifth century is a treatise written by an anonymous grammarian some time between 450 and 550. Although Schindler has identified it as a common source for Isidore of Seville and Julian of Toledo, he does not agree that it directly draws on classical authors as sources.

148 Cyr. *Juln.* 7 (PG 76:860A).

149 So too Regazzoni (1928), 87; Malley (1978), 226–36; esp. note 9 (p. 228).

150 According to Malley's (1978) index, instances of Julian using *paideia* in this understanding are: *Jul. ep.* 201:413D (Bidez 1.2:231); *ep.* 35:416A (1.2:62); *ep.* 61c:423A (1.2:74); *or.* 3.1:49C (Bidez 1.1:117); *Gal.* 849D–852A (Neumann, 205).

151 Malley (1978), 120–21 on further references, esp. *Jul. ep.* 61:422B (Bidez 1.2:73).

152 Malley (1978), 126.

153 Gemeinhardt (2007), 384.

154 *Papyrus Bouriant* 1 (Ziebarth, 1913, 21–2, no. 46); Gemeinhardt (2007), 350; Marksches (2002), 101–2.

155 See Criore (2007), 48–50.

Rather, he suggests that the treatise can be taken as indicating the declining interest in classical education in the West.¹⁵⁶ This treatise quotes from Cicero, Terence and Vergil to give stylistic examples of good wording, albeit in fragmentary form. It is therefore possible that these allusions were not direct quotations. They may have been based on earlier extracts of classical quotations. It therefore appears that grammatical education in this time and region did include classical studies, but that these studies consisted only of short quotations rather than full texts.

Riché has therefore correctly warned against the presumption that after the fall of Rome school educational praxis in the West continued to include ancient authors other than Vergil. Instead, exercise and grammatical handbooks containing quotations from a range of classical literature (*florilegia*) were in use.¹⁵⁷ But the scale of these allusions and references stand in marked contrast to what we do know about rhetorical education from extant handbooks of the Early Empire (Quintilian stands as a pertinent example). This body of evidence suggests that a far larger canon of ancient authors was available in the first and second centuries. Nevertheless, the *Life of Fulgentius*, bishop of Ruspe (in modern Tunisia), attests that grammar schools continued to exist under Vandal reign, well into the late fifth century. It is clear that the students learned Latin authors there. Whether these included the classics or only Christian Latin authors is difficult to say. All we know is that the Christian mother of young Fulgentius made him study Homer and Menander intensively in private lessons. These authors were not taught in schools because they wrote in Greek, but it appears that they were studied in private.¹⁵⁸

5.7 Conclusion

John Chrysostom and other Christian authors repeatedly present Christianity as a new way of life that has finally replaced the ancestral tradition that was based on the teachings of philosophers. Using a rhetoric of destruction and ridiculisation, John in particular links this dialectic to the martyrs and persecutions of the past, such as to the Great Persecution, while acknowledging that the philosophical knowledge of the past was not entirely lost at that time. This historic link informs the overall claim of the Christian authors that I have discussed to physi-

¹⁵⁶ Schindel (2003), 183–9; contra: Gemeinhardt (2007), 383.

¹⁵⁷ Riché (1976), 194, 471–2, 498.

¹⁵⁸ *Vita Fulgentii* 1 (Eno, 7).

cally remove ancient philosophical knowledge from the Christian community as elitist, demonic, producing heretical opinions and so as detrimental to the unity of Christianity. These exhortations may therefore have influenced the decisions of Christian communities about which texts were regarded not to be worthy of preservation.

However, in engaging in extensive readings of John's work, one needs to be careful not to mistake their rhetoric for the reality that they purport to depict. Radical sermons can have little relevance to the actual behaviour of much of society and their biases and polemical intents are often clear and distinct. Their consecutive readings in this text indicate, for example, that like Libanius, John makes excessive use of the florid style of late antique rhetoric to draw dire pictures of the groups who exist outside the parameters of Christian orthodoxy.¹⁵⁹ But it must also be noted that John was a contemporary, speaking to his contemporaries, in an accepted contemporary style. As such, as Hartney has argued, the homilies discussed in this chapter had a central place in the Christian liturgy performed in churches.¹⁶⁰ While the question of who attended John's sermons has been a matter of some academic debate, it appears that he spoke primarily to the upper echelons of society, and to a socially diverse group in Antioch, and later Constantinople.¹⁶¹ At that time, the power of the see of Constantinople was second only to Rome's and John's episcopal tenure there granted him great power and influence where he had been an unwordly cleric with little authority in Antioch. His preaching was not necessarily successful. For example, John was committed, too, to abolishing the games, but was unsuccessful in this as the games continued to enjoy popularity.¹⁶² In many ways, it is clear that John was an extremist and a nuisance. But that does not deny the reality that his writings were considered important in the centuries to follow. Their preaching of a radically pure Christianity that excluded any pagan element was attractive to similar-minded ascetics. Although it did not necessarily filter through to all aspects of the broader influence of Christianity or down to the rest of the Christian population it was an influence on its development, and must be acknowledged as such.

Libanius and Ammianus are two examples of pagan authors who complain that the current imperial policy is responsible for the decline of ancient literature

¹⁵⁹ Wilken (1983), 95–127 and Hahn (2004), 143–5 in favour of rhetorical exaggeration.

¹⁶⁰ Hartney (2004), 33–51.

¹⁶¹ Surveys of the debate are found in Hartney (2004), 43–50; Maxwell (2006), 65–87; Mayer and Allen (2000), 34–40, esp. 40: “effective communication networks”; Illert (2000), 25–36, esp. 35: John addressed both *humiliores* and *honestiores* in his homilies.

¹⁶² See Leyerle (2001); Hartney (2004).

as wordly or clerical careers no longer required education in the classics. As a consequence, it is occasionally attested that institutions which preserved these traditions were shut down. It has been argued by others that Ammianus blames the physical decline of books and libraries mainly on changing interests, but on the balance of probability I have provided evidence to suggest that he occasionally criticised the changing religious climate in a way similar as Libanius did.

While in the case of Jerome it is clear that he felt to have the authority to exclude from long-term preservation certain works that he disapproved of, I have discussed evidence from other important Christian authors to suggest that their moral engagement with ancient literary traditions had a similar long-term influence on the preservation of literature. On the one hand, it is well known that there was a broad consensus shared by both ecclesiastical and lay authors to generally exempt classical works from demonisation, although the interest in classical authors increasingly declined in western Europe after the fourth century. Augustine, for example, frequently endorsed the works of Plato, and many Christian authors of Late Antiquity were based on Plato and other ancient philosophers, whose opinions they held in high regard as long as they did not contradict the Bible. Their strategy was to allege that these positive philosophical views were themselves influenced by the Judaeo-Christian tradition. On the other hand, it has also become clear that texts that dealt specifically with pagan religion were considered as demonical as books on magic or divination. The most obvious example for this are the pertinent works by Varro, which are quoted and discussed by Augustine, but seem to have gone lost soon after. This chapter therefore illustrates the power that was attributed to books with different contents in Late Antiquity. Keeping in mind these specific powers of books in Late Antiquity, in the next chapter I shall discuss the evidence for the destruction of libraries either intentionally or accidentally in the wake of religious riots.

6 Destruction of Libraries

In the last chapter we have seen that some Christian groups, such as monks and ascetics, were opposed not only to specific aspects of pagan literature such as magic, astrology, heresy and the philosophical discourses that informed it, but also to pagan literature as a whole. This does not mean that there was a concerted effort to destroy these books, but there are reasons to think that in cases of violent religious conflicts books could also be the object of destruction, given the power that some attributed to books. The fourth and fifth century are generally characterised by a number of religious conflicts having to do with the ecclesiastical and social controversies at that time. Ecclesiastical dissent and Christian–pagan tensions often gave rise to factionalism, riots and street-fighting in the major cities of the Roman Empire.

In this context, it has been assumed that Christians in Late Antiquity destroyed large libraries.¹ But the source evidence for this assumption must be questioned. These incidents are often best viewed as isolated reactions set within a broader context of religious violence that frequently broke out in Late Antiquity. I shall therefore now scrutinise the incidents of books burnt incidentally during raids and riots, arguing that in many cases religion was an important factor that instigated mob violence. While I have so far discussed incidents of book-burning that usually had to do with imperial legislation, this chapter will deal with instances in which any destruction of books was probably unintentional, but perhaps openly tolerated as the necessary outcome of a building being destroyed.

I shall first discuss the case of a library founded by the emperor Julian in Antioch and destroyed by his successor Jovian. While this incident at first glance appears to be a clear case of deliberate destruction on religious grounds, upon closer study it is clear that the source evidence is ambiguous. I shall then discuss the destruction of a large library in Rome, arguing that this too may have been the result of a religious riot, although the evidence is unclear. I shall go on to analyse the source evidence for the end of Alexandria's two main libraries. My aim is to support the view put forward in previous scholarship that the library in the Museion may well have continued to exist until the religious riot in 391, during which the Serapeum was reportedly destroyed. In this context, it is also interesting to read the evidence on the philosopher Hypatia of Alexandria as a case study for allegations lodged against subversive books at that time. I shall then analyse the scant evidence for the destruction of libraries or archives

¹ Prinz (2004), 4.

during the sack of Rome in 410, arguing that Prudentius may have had knowledge of this and that he justified the destruction as welcome from a Christian apologetic standpoint, as Orosius did as well. Finally, I shall discuss the evidence for the repeated destruction of the library in Constantinople.

6.1 A Temple Destroyed in Antioch

Julian's plan to revive paganism as the central religion of the Roman Empire inevitably led to irritation. Christians and pagans alike felt that the emperor had stretched it too far. His immediate successors were therefore keen to present themselves as very distant from Julian's religious policy after his untimely and ominous death in battle in 363. All of the emperors after him were quick to present themselves as Christian rulers. Because Julian was supportive of, and himself advised by, prominent pagan philosophers, his short rule had evoked the memories of the persecutions of the past. The immediate policy following Julian's death was to reverse this kind of protectionism of pagan philosophy. Statues of Julian were overthrown, his name erased from inscriptions.

It is therefore perhaps not unsurprising that one library was allegedly destroyed by a Christian emperor during the short rule of the emperor Jovian, successor to the last pagan emperor Julian. However, this case has many problematic elements. It is only recorded in late, unreliable and hostile accounts, especially by John of Antioch, a monk of the sixth or early seventh century. Fragments of his work only survive in later collections (from the tenth century in this case). The text from Mariev's recent edition is a good place to start unpicking these:²

They [the inhabitants of Antioch] directed their mockery at his wife as well, because of the destruction of a temple. For the emperor Hadrian had established a small elegant temple for the deification and honour of his father Trajan, which Julian the Apostate made into a library. It was this temple that Jovian burned down along with all its books.

The destruction of the temple-library would have resulted in a riot had not Jovian left the city. It was probably the pagan population that forced Jovian to leave. The following parallel text, preserved by Suidas, mentions that Jovian was influ-

² Jo. Ant. fr. 206 (Mariev, 371): καθαρπτόμενοι καὶ τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν τοῦ ἱεροῦ καταστροφὴν. Ἀδριανὸς μὲν γὰρ ὁ βασιλεὺς εἰς ἀποθέωσιν καὶ τιμὴν τοῦ πατρὸς Τραϊανοῦ ἔκτισε μικρόν τινα καὶ χαριέστατον ναόν, ὃν Ἰουλιανὸς ὁ παραβάτης βιβλιοθήκην κατεσκεύασεν· ὃν σὺν τοῖς βιβλίοις Ἰοβιανὸς κατέκαυσεν.

enced by his wife and gives an interesting addition to the reaction of the Antiochians. It probably contains a fragment from Eunapius, a contemporary pagan philosopher:³

And Jovian, incited by his wife, burned down an elegant temple, erected by the emperor Hadrian for the deification of his father Trajan and turned into a library by Julian for the eunuch Theophilus. He burnt it down along with all the books it had, and the concubines themselves laid the fire, under laughter. The Antiochians were displeased with the emperor and threw out some of the books on the ground so that whoever wanted could pick them up and read them, but they attached other books to the walls.

We have seen that Christian polemicists often use terms of deriding and laughter to deprecate ancient, pre-Christian, or competing literatures. This could mean that according to this account in Suidas the destruction of books was not only incidental to the destruction of the temple but that Jovian's concubines deliberately destroyed books.

Yet the historicity of the text is not without doubt. If the original text was written by Eunapius, then this accounts for a certain amount of hostility against Jovian. Zonaras, writing in the twelfth century but using earlier sources reports that Jovian returned the exiled Christian priests to Antioch when staying there but also decorated Julian's memorial in Tarsus, suggesting that he was not always hostile towards Julian. We know that Jovian's wife was not present at his death soon after;⁴ but it is unclear whether or not she was with him in Antioch, as John of Antioch claims. Neither Zonaras or Philostorgius, or the contemporary Ammianus Marcellinus mention the destruction of the library when reporting Jovian's stay in Antioch.⁵ John's account is detailed, but the whole fragment is very hostile, and it is therefore not clear that the burning was directly ordered by Jovian. Speyer put forward the idea that it "certainly was hatred of his predecessor"⁶ (in reaction to Julian's teacher edict) that caused Jovian to act in this way and there is evidence that during his short time in charge Jovian indeed

3 Suid. s.v. Ἰοβιανός, 401 Adler = Eun. fr. 29.1 Blockley: ὁ δὲ Ἰοβιανός, ἐκ τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ κινηθεὶς τὸν ὑπὸ Ἀδριανοῦ τοῦ βασιλέως κτισθέντα ναὸν χαριέστατον ἐς ἀποθέωσιν τοῦ πατρὸς Τραϊανοῦ, παρὰ δὲ τοῦ Ἰουλιανοῦ κατασταθέντα βιβλιοθήκην εὐνούχῳ τινὶ Θεοφίλῳ, κατέφλεξε σὺν πᾶσιν οἷς εἶχε βιβλίοις, αὐτῶν τῶν παλλακίδων ὑφαπτουσῶν μετὰ γέλωτος τὴν πυράν. οἱ δὲ Ἀντιοχεῖς ἡγανάκτησαν κατὰ τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ τὰ μὲν ἀπέρριπτον τῶν βιβλίων ἐς τὸ ἔδαφος, ὥστε ἀναίρεσθαι τὸν βουλόμενον καὶ ἀναγινώσκειν, τὰ δὲ τοῖς τοίχοις προσεκόλλιζον.

4 Zonar. *epit. hist.* 13.14.

5 Philost. *h.e.* 8.5; Amm. 25.10.3 felt instead urged to pass over pagan philosophy.

6 Speyer (1981), 135–6.

took actions against pagan philosophers.⁷ Whether or not he actually destroyed the library is less clear.

Julian's library in Antioch was also a temple dedicated to Trajan by Hadrian, Trajan's adoptive son. It is well known that also other ancient libraries were located in temples, such as in the case of the Museion, an ancient research institute, which may have housed the great library of Alexandria and was a temple to the Muses. Books were also stored in baths and in gymnasia.⁸ As with temples, these institutions, seen as housing demons, were often demolished or abandoned as a consequence of Christianisation in Late Antiquity unless they were turned into Christian buildings.⁹

In this context, several laws at different times in the *Codex Theodosianus* ruled against the temples.¹⁰ While there are laws to preserve statues and ornaments because of their value (they could be reused as images of saints),¹¹ other laws later ordered the destruction of sacred items.¹² Constantine's son and successor in the West, Constans (337–350), in 346 ruled that “all superstition must be completely eradicated” in the city of Rome.¹³ The *Codex Theodosianus* is silent on the question of what to do with books found in temples. However, a law issued by Arcadius and Honorius in 399, related to Africa, ordered that constructions of temples still standing have to be “empty of illegal things.”¹⁴ The law explicitly mentions sacrifices and idols, although it is possible that “illegal things” could also be interpreted as books, especially if their content was directly related to pagan religion or divination. It is safe to assume that repeated bans to access pagan temples were detrimental to the preservation of any books they contained as temples and libraries were prone to natural disasters.

6.2 The Palatine Library in Rome

Unlike the previous example, where the cause of destruction can be inferred, there are some cases where libraries were destroyed but no clear reason is

⁷ Them. or. 7.99c (Schenkel and Downey, 1.149).

⁸ Overview: Wendel (1954); there is less evidence for public libraries in the West than there is for the (Hellenistic) East. On libraries in the West, Vössing (1994).

⁹ On cultural vandalism, Sauer (2003).

¹⁰ *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.3–4, 6, 10–11, 16, 25.

¹¹ *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.8 (382) and 15 (399).

¹² *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.19 (415/6); *Const. Sirmond.* 12 (407).

¹³ *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.3: *omnis superstitio penitus eruenta sit.*

¹⁴ *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.18: *Aedes illicitis rebus vacuas, nostrarum beneficio sanctionum, ne quis conetur evertere.*

known. There is evidence for the accidental destruction of a large library in Rome before the 380s.¹⁵ Ammianus reports that the emperor Julian was troubled by nightmares on the eve of 19 March 363 during the early phases of his Persian campaign, noting that:¹⁶

On this same night the temple of Palatine Apollo in the eternal city went up in flames during the prefecture of Apronianus. Had there not been help from various sides the raging flames would even have consumed the Sibylline oracles.

The Palatine library had been founded by Augustus. Located in the portico of this temple, it was among the largest libraries in Rome.¹⁷ Ammianus does not mention explicitly that the library was destroyed on this occasion nor does he say that the temple was destroyed deliberately; but *templum* usually refers to the sacred area as a whole rather than the actual building (*aedes*). Augustus himself had canonized the Sibylline books by burning more than two thousand prophetic writings that were anonymously circulating in order to bar unwanted prophesies about his reign from circulation. He deposited the remains deemed authentic in two gilded cases under the pedestal of the Palatine Apollo, outside of the Palatine library.¹⁸ These are the books mentioned in the source as having been rescued from the flames. During Julian's reign it is likely that these were the first to be rescued. While it is possible that other books were destroyed in the fire, this is not explicitly evidenced.

Commentators are right to see a link between the fire in the temple of Apollo in Rome and that in the temple of the same god in Daphne on 22 October 362, less than half a year earlier.¹⁹ While Ammianus does not blame the fire on Antioch's Christian community either, the Christian community could have had a motive because Julian displaced the neighbouring martyr shrine when he arrived in Antioch.²⁰ Julian himself thought that Christians were responsible for the fire. One Christian author offers the implausible explanation that the building was struck by lightning.²¹ John Chrysostom, on the other hand, wrote that God burnt the temple to punish Julian, and he also propagated fire as an instrument

¹⁵ Vössing (1997), 643–4; Fehrle (1986), 63–4.

¹⁶ Amm. 23.3.3: *hac eadem nocte Palatini Apollinis templum praefecturam regente Aproniano in urbe conflagravit aeterna, ubi, ni multiplex iuvisset auxilium, etiam Cumana carmina consumpserat magnitudo flammarum.*

¹⁷ See Horsfall (1993), 58.

¹⁸ Suet. Aug. 31.1. See Rzach (1923).

¹⁹ Rike (1987), 27–30; followed by den Boeft et al. (1998), ad locum, p. 39.

²⁰ Amm. 22.13.2.

²¹ Thdt. h.e. 3.11.5 (GCS 44:188).

necessary for Christians to extinguish “the fire of idolatry.”²² Some kind of religious motivation as the source for the fires both in Antioch and Rome can, therefore, perhaps be inferred. However, various reasons could have been the cause for any fire in the ancient world, and all we can say is that some Christians welcomed the accidental destruction of temples, especially since the Sibylline books were a prestigious symbol of Julian’s religious policy.

The fate of the Palatine library continued to fascinate scholars in the centuries to come. John of Salisbury wrote in the twelfth century that Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) not only persecuted astrology (*mathesis*), “as reported by our ancestors”²³ but also burnt the Palatine library so “that there might be more space for the Holy Scriptures”, causing its final destruction.²⁴ But as this is largely anecdotal, scholars have unanimously dismissed the trustworthiness of this later report at least on the case of its second point.²⁵ John of Salisbury was an early representative of late-medieval humanism and an enthusiastic reader of the classics. He therefore bewails the dearth of classical writings in his age, blaming this on the negligence and culpable behaviour of late antique clerics. The reason for the destruction of libraries is clearer in the case of Alexandria.

6.3 The Library of Alexandria

The fate of Alexandria’s library, the largest of the ancient world, although frequently discussed, is shrouded in mystery.²⁶ Because of its size and importance, the fate of its books has an obvious impact on the preservation of ancient literature. A number of destructions are recorded. The first happened when Caesar attacked the city and set Ptolemy’s fleet on fire. Yet, the ancient sources contradict each other as to the extent of the loss. The earliest testimonial is that of Seneca, who in the first century AD states that 40,000 books were destroyed

²² Chrys. *pan. Bab.* 2.23–9, quotation at 102 (*SC* 362:120–28 and 232).

²³ Joh. Saresber. *policr.* 2.26: *ad haec doctorum sanctissimus ille Gregorius, qui melleo praedicationis imbre totam rigavit et debriavit ecclesiam, non modo mathesim iussit ab aula sed, ut traditur a maioribus, incendio dedit reprobatae lectionis scripta, Palatinus quaecumque tenebat Apollo, in quibus erant praecipua quae caelestium mentem et supernorum oracula videbantur hominibus revelare.*

²⁴ Joh. Saresber. *policr.* 8.19: *fertur tamen beatus Gregorius bibliothecam combussisse gentilem, quo divinae paginae gratior esset locus et maior auctoritas et diligentia studiosior.*

²⁵ Werner (2007), 27; Beeson (1945), 208; Speyer (1981), 133, note 18 lists literature on the Renaissance debate of whether or not Gregory the Great destroyed whole volumes of Livy.

²⁶ Publications include contributions in El-Abbadi (2008); El-Abbadi (1992); Barnes (2004); Canfora (1989); Parsons (1952).

on this occasion. This is supported by the early third century historian Cassius Dio, who attests that only “storehouses of grain and books” ready for export were destroyed.²⁷ By contrast, the manuscripts of both Aulus Gellius (second century) and Ammianus Marcellinus (fourth century) give the figure of some 700,000 books lost while the Christian Orosius speaks of 400,000 losses.²⁸ This variation may be due to scribal errors as most scholars today agree that the damage caused by Caesar’s Alexandrian war was marginal, and that Alexandria continued to be a scholarly centre.²⁹ Its worth and standing in this context are shown by the Emperor Domitian (81–96) replenishing the stocks of two large libraries that had recently been destroyed by a fire in the city of Rome by ordering books from everywhere, which were then proofread against books in Alexandria to ensure their accuracy.³⁰ Figures on the amount of books in the library of Alexandria need to be treated with caution.

In the age of Hellenism, the Serapeum was the daughter library and it was said to have held 42,800 scrolls, while the main library had 490,000.³¹ It appears to have played a more important role after Caesar’s Alexandrian War up to Late Antiquity.³² According to several contemporary sources, Christians destroyed the Serapeum in 391 (or 392).³³ The accounts of this were written by Christians, with the exception of the Neoplatonist Eunapius who gives the most extensive account of the destruction. The specific biases of the sources have therefore to be taken into account.

Alexandria had long been characterised by ethnic and religious diversity as well as a tradition of factionalism and rioting, compounded by Theodosius’s anti-pagan legislation in 391, which provided the background for the destruction of the Serapeum. Aided by imperial support, Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria,

27 Sen. *de tranquillitate animi* 9.5; Dio Cass. 42.38.2: ἀποθήκας καὶ τοῦ σίτου καὶ τῶν βιβλίων. All extant manuscripts containing Seneca’s text have *quadraginta milia* (40,000). The variation *quadringenta milia* (400,000) is a modern emendation based on Orosius’ text. See Reynolds (1977), ad locum.

28 Gell. 7.17.3; Amm. 22.16.13; Oros. *hist.* 6.15.31. Den Boeft et al. (1995), ad locum, p. 299–301 suggest that the manuscript containing Ammianus’ text may have been corrupt and was corrected based on Aulus Gellius.

29 Pöhlmann (1994), 39; Barnes (2004), 72; on further testimonials, El-Abbadi (1992), 156.

30 Suet. *Dom.* 20.

31 Tzetzes *Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* I 1 (1899), p. 19 and 31. On the acquisition of books, J. *AJ* 12.11–16

32 Tert. *apol.* 18.8: “To this day, at the temple of Serapis, the libraries of Ptolemy are to be seen” (*hodie apud serapeum Ptolemaei bibliothecae ... exhibentur*); Amm. 22.16.17–19; Ath. *v.Anton.* 72, 80.

33 Date suggested by Hahn (2006).

turned a local temple of Dionysius into a church. Zealous Christians plundered the temple and paraded around anything found therein in triumph. As a consequence of this provocation, violence and street-fighting occurred. Pagans retreated to the Serapeum, probably because it was well fortified. Concerned about the scale of the violence, the local authority formally asked the emperor Theodosius about how to proceed. Theodosius' acknowledgement of Christians as martyrs that had been killed during the riot prompted Theophilus to feel justified in storming the building. When this happened, the temple was razed to the ground and everything in it spoiled and destroyed. At many points the contents of the temple were burnt throughout the city – an action supported by the authorities. The temple was eventually replaced by a church.³⁴ After this, monks under the command of Theophilus are said to have destroyed other temples in and around Alexandria, searched and exorcised private houses and obliterated symbols related to paganism found therein.³⁵ The Church historian Rufinus reports for Canopus that among their targets was a school that seems to have stored hieroglyphic writings.³⁶

There was something similar to a public school of magical arts, under the pretense of the study of priestly writings, for so they call the ancient letters of the Egyptians. The pagans worshipped this place as a source and origin of demons to such an extent that it was much more famous than that of Alexandria. [...] Everything was destroyed and razed to the ground.

This episode illustrates the general decline of the knowledge of hieroglyphs in Egypt in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. An inscription dating to 394, found on the island of Philae in Upper Egypt, has been identified as the last extant hieroglyphic inscription.³⁷ While it is known that Asclepiades along with fellow latter-day priests of Osiris performed traditional funeral rites involving the use of hieroglyphs in Alexandria as late as in the fifth century, these hieroglyphs were apparently unintelligible to these last pagans, for Asclepiades' son Horapollon later published two volumes on the allegorical interpretation of hieroglyphs which he was unable to understand.³⁸

³⁴ Socr. *h.e.* 5.16–17; Rufin. *hist.* 11.23; Joh. Nik. 78.45; 83.38.

³⁵ Rufin. *hist.* 11.22–31; Eun. VS 472 (Wright, 420); *Historia ecclesiae Alexandrinae* (Orlandi 2:61–2, cf. 95–7 on further sources); See Leppin (2003), 170–73.

³⁶ Rufin. *hist.* 11.26: *ubi praetextu sacerdotalium litterarum, ita etenim appellant antiquas Aegyptiorum litteras, magicae artis erat paene publica schola. quem locum velut fontem quendam atque originem daemonum in tantum venerabantur pagani, ut multo ibi maior celebritas quam apud Alexandriam haberetur. ... vastata sunt omnia atque ad solum deducta.*

³⁷ Barb (1971), 138.

³⁸ Haas (1997), 171–2.

Some scholars have proposed that the books from the library in the Serapeum might have survived because no source explicitly mentions book-burning, noting that Aphthonius, former student of Libanius, suggests that he knows of the book collection (perhaps after 391). Against this position, El-Abbadi convincingly argues that Aphthonius referred to the book collection in the past tense only.³⁹ A passage from Orosius' early fifth century apologetic *History against the Pagans* gives evidence that books were plundered and probably destroyed:⁴⁰

Even today there are book chests extant in temples which we ourselves have seen. People remember that these books were destroyed and the book chests emptied by our own people in our own time, which is indeed a true statement.

The passage is related to the destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria because Orosius inserts it as a digression into his account of Caesar's war there.⁴¹ Orosius claims to have seen the empty book shelves with his own eyes but this can be disputed as he is not unequivocally known to have visited Alexandria.⁴² The plunderers, "our own people in our own time" are almost certainly Christians because in Latin the personal pronoun "our" (*noster*) refers to the group that the author identifies himself with, more clearly than in English. It must be noted that in my translation the relative pronoun *quibus* corresponds to *librorum* ("books") because it directly follows it, but others think that *quibus* corresponds to *templis* because of the order of events. This would mean that the temples were plundered rather than that the books were plundered or destroyed and that, although the book chests were emptied, the fate of the books is unknown, but this reading does not correspond to the normal use of Latin grammar. The passage is therefore indicative of the fate of many books in the library.

Two further testimonials indicate that there was probably still a library in the temple of Serapis before its destruction. According to Sozomenus, the fifth-century Church historian, a man named Olympius persuaded the pagans in the Serapeum to continue its defence by suggesting that it was better to die

³⁹ El-Abbadi (1992), 161–7. Aphthonius (Botti, 1897, 23–6); the temple was demolished: Eun. VS 472 (Wright, 420–22); the image of Serapis burnt: Thdt. h.e. 5.22 (GCS 44:321).

⁴⁰ Oros. hist. 6.5.32: *Unde quamlibet hodieque in templis extant, quae et nos vidimus, armaria librorum, quibus direptis exinanita ea a nostris hominibus nostris temporibus memorent – quod quidem verum est.*

⁴¹ Recently Barnes (2004), 73.

⁴² Orosius was from Bracara (today in Portugal), came to Africa in 414, travelled to Jerome in Bethlehem and participated in the council of Jerusalem in 415.

than to give up their ancestral tradition.⁴³ Although the temple rather than the library it contained was the object of the religious zeal and ire, Olympius seems to have been worried about the philosophical tradition contained in the library because Olympius ostentatiously showed himself in the philosopher dress. The destruction of the Serapeum has also been traditionally linked to the well-known epigram written by the pagan teacher Palladas who bewails the end of Hellenism: “Are we pagans not dead and living only in appearance, plunged into misery, likening life to a dream? Do we not live a life that is dead?”⁴⁴

Alan Cameron has put forward the interpretation that after Theodosius’ legislation of 391, Palladas lost his profession as a grammarian because he taught the classics and was accused of paganism. Palladas himself wrote that he had to sell his “worrisome book-scrolls” because his poetry could potentially cause his death.⁴⁵ He complains that “we Hellenes are men reduced to ashes.”⁴⁶ Yet if pagan teaching was actually prohibited, then according to Cameron the ban at that time was singular and short-lived.⁴⁷ It is interesting that his extant poems contain Pythagorean philosophy. To my mind, this rather than his poetry as a whole could have rendered his books offensive at that time and he may have felt threatened by ascetics rather than by state authorities, while his profession was in decline rather than prohibited. Wilkinson, however, recently dated Palladas’ poems to the age of Constantine. The main evidence produced in favour of this early date and not discussed in previous scholarship is a codex fragment, which he assumes to be from before 350. The fragment contains epigrams which were probably authored by Palladas.⁴⁸ However, while recent research has argued convincingly that Palladas wrote his poems before the 390s and the new epigrams confirm this, Wilkinson’s reasons to assign Palladas’ work to the age of Constantine are based on circumstantial evidence. As such it cannot be ruled out that Palladas wrote this poem on the end of paganism after Con-

⁴³ Soz. *h.e.* 7.15.2–6, esp. 6: ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ Ὀλύμπιος τις ἐν φιλοσόφου σχήματι συνὼν αὐτοῖς καὶ πείθων χρῆναι μὴ ἀμελεῖν τῶν πατρίων, ἀλλ’ εἰ δέοι ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν θνήσκειν.

⁴⁴ AP 10.82: ἄρα μὴ θανόντες τῷ δοκεῖν ζῶμεν μόνον, | Ἕλληνες ἄνδρες, συμφορᾷ πεπτωκότες, | ὄνειρον εἰκάζοντες εἶναι τὸν βίον; | ἢ ζῶμεν ἡμεῖς τοῦ βίου τεθνηκότος; On Palladas and the destruction of the Serapeum, Hahn (2008).

⁴⁵ AP 9.171: Ὅργανα Μουσάων, τὰ πολύστονα βιβλία πωλῶ. | εἰς ἑτέρας τέχνης ἔργα μετερχόμενος, | Πιερίδες, σφύζισθε· λόγοι, συντάσσομαι ὤμιν· | σύνταξις γὰρ ἐμοὶ καὶ θάνατον παρέχει.

⁴⁶ AP 10.90: Ἕλληνες ἔσμεν ἄνδρες ἐσποδωμένοι.

⁴⁷ Alan Cameron (1965), 26–8.

⁴⁸ Wilkinson (2012); Wilkinson (2009), 42, note 34.

stantine and even as late as the age of Valens.⁴⁹ In this case the Palladas poem could even give further evidence for book-burning or other sanctions against pagans under Valens or earlier.

The second library testimonial is also from a Christian author. In his first speech against the Jews, John Chrysostom discoursed on the question of whether or not Christian books make the synagogue a holy place. He thought it evident that the Septuagint Bible does not do so with regard to the Serapeum library of Alexandria:⁵⁰

So what? Will the temple of Serapis be holy because of its books? Of course not! While those books do have a holiness of their own, they do not share it with a place if those who meet there are defiled.

In context, he holds that the Serapeum and its library are as “impure” as, for example, the temple of Apollo in Daphne, the destruction of which had been welcomed by the Christian congregation. The speech dates from the autumn of 386 in Antioch,⁵¹ a few years before the Serapeum was actually destroyed, indicating that there were still books at this time in the Serapeum.

As to the fate of the Museion, it has frequently been suggested that the building was destroyed when Emperor Aurelian in 272 took Alexandria from Zenobia, queen of the breakaway kingdom of Palmyra. Scholars rate the likelihood that this occurred as variously from a certainty to a possibility.⁵² Despite the wars of the third century that involved Alexandria, the archaeological evidence to date does not determine exactly when the area ceased to be inhabited.⁵³ Moreover, it is not firmly evidenced that the Museion contained all or parts of the library. At first glance, the destruction of the large library seems to be supported by Epiphanius of Salamis who wrote about the “library in the same city of Alexander, in the so-called Brucheion; this is a region of the city today lying

⁴⁹ Wilkinson (2009), 42: “it is tempting to place the compilation of this work [by Palladas] before a.d. 350. At any rate, it was almost certainly in existence by the 370s.”

⁵⁰ Chrys. *Jud.* 1.6 (PG 48:851): τί οὖν, ἅγιος ἔσται τοῦ Σεράπιδος ὁ ναὸς διὰ τὰ βιβλία; μὴ γένοιτο! ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνα μὲν ἔχει τὴν οἰκίαν ἁγιότητα, τῷ τόπῳ δὲ οὐ μεταδίδωσι, διὰ τὴν τῶν συνιόντων ἐκεῖ μιαιφάν.

⁵¹ Meeks and Wilken (1978), 83.

⁵² Den Boeft (1995), 301: “may have been completely destroyed”; Barnes (2004), 73: “probably”, Pöhlmann (1994), 39: *wurde ... zerstört*. Vössing (2008), 244: *seit der Tetrarchenzeit zerstört (en)*.

⁵³ See Mojssov (2010), 104.

waste.”⁵⁴ But Epiphanius wrote in 392 and could have noted the recent destruction caused by the religious riot.⁵⁵ El-Abbadi argues that the Museion continued to exist until the end of the fourth century, because Synesius of Cyrene still mentions the Museion and described the images of the philosophers in it. Furthermore, Suidas refers to Theon, philosopher and mathematician, father of Hypatia, as a fellow of the Museion early during the reign of Theodosius (379–394), which is the last evidence for its existence.⁵⁶ El-Abbadi therefore suggests that the Museion was destroyed in 391 or shortly after.⁵⁷ Vössing, however, recently proposed that in other cities Museion could refer generally to a school and that Zacharias Scholasticus mentions *to témenos ton Mousón* in Alexandria after 512. This school could be identical with the Museion mentioned by Synesius and therefore different from the Hellenistic Museion and its famous library.⁵⁸ On the other hand, *témenos* refers to a temple district rather than the actual building (*naós, hierón*). The passage is interesting, but it does not provide clear proof that Synesius and Zacharias had the same place in mind.

In any case, El-Abbadi could be correct in challenging the common scholarly reading of Ammianus as attesting the destruction of the area in which the Museion and the library were located in 272. Ammianus, in fact, wrote that Alexandria “lost” (*amisit*) the Brucheion.⁵⁹ The only evidence for the actual destruction of the area before Theodosius is Jerome’s translation of Eusebius’ chronicle which is generally unreliable. The destruction is dated there erroneously to the end of the reign of Claudius Gothicus (268–270) rather than to 272.⁶⁰ The account in Eusebius’ Church history, on the other hand, knows only of the siege, but not of the destruction.⁶¹

54 Epiph. *de mens. et pond.* 9 (Moutsoulas, l. 258–60): βιβλιοθήκην ... ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτῆς Ἀλεξάνδρου πόλεως ἐν τῷ Βρουχίῳ καλουμένῳ (κλίμα δὲ ἔστι τοῦτο τῆς αὐτῆς πόλεως ἔρημον τανῦν ὑπάρχον). Contra Hahn (2006), 381, who argues that Epiphanius’ silence on the destruction of the Serapeum means that the Serapeum was not destroyed in early 392 in the first place.

55 On the date, Epiph. *de mens. et pond.* 20 (Moutsoulas, l. 583–4).

56 Synes. *calv.* 6; Suid. s.v. Θέων, 205 Adler.

57 El-Abbadi (1992), 160.

58 Zach. *opif.* 98 (Minniti Colonna, 107): τὸ τέμενος τῶν Μουσῶν; Vössing (2008), 236–7, 243–4. Contra: McKenzie (2007), 69, 79 mentions a bonfire of cult statues there.

59 Amm. 22.16.15: “The walls were destroyed and Alexandria lost the greatest part of the region called the Brucheion, which had long been the dwelling place of outstanding men” (*Alexandria ... prolapsis dirutisque moenibus amisit regionum maximam partem, quae Bruchion appellabatur, diuturnum praestantium hominum domicilium*). Generally on the reconquest, Hist. Aug. *Aurelian.* 32; Hist Aug. *Firmus* 3.

60 Hier. *chron.*, a. Abr. 2286, AD 270 (GCS 47:221): *In Alexandria Bruchium, quod per multos annos fuerat obsessum, tandem destruitur.*

61 Eus. *h.e.* 7.32.7–12.

I want to contribute one passage so far unnoticed by scholarship to these questions. In a letter, Jerome refers to the Brucheion as independent from Alexandria. He mentions “Brucheion, not far from Alexandria” as the dwelling place of monks,⁶² apparently having in mind a monastery close to this area.⁶³ The Christian anchorite Hilarion fled there because the authority of Gaza during Julian’s reign charged Hilarion with practising magic and searched for him. Jerome’s geo-political knowledge is trustworthy because he had travelled to the East. This note suggests that Ammianus meant the area was detached from the city of Alexandria rather than destroyed. This reading makes more sense because the Romans are known to have punished cities by reducing them in their size rather than by destroying them. Aurelian seems to have given Gaza administrative rights over the Brucheion, which is located on the Eastern outskirts of the city, heading to nearby Gaza. Constantine had raised Gaza to the status of a city because its residents had destroyed the temples located in the harbour area.⁶⁴ This explains why it was officials from Gaza rather than from Alexandria that sought out Hilarion there, as Jerome continues his account. This interpretation supports the assumption that the library was not damaged during the reconquest of 272, but that according to Epiphanius it was destroyed by 392.

There are more reasons to think that some books were seen as problematic in Alexandria during this period of time. Evidence for this can be found in the correspondence of Synesius with his teacher Hypatia, who was eventually murdered and mutilated in a church by a Christian mob. Hypatia and her father Theon were the last scholarly members of the Museion in Alexandria. Reporting on Hypatia’s death in the seventh century, John of Nikiou describes Hypatia as a magician, suggesting that a grey area existed in designations of and between ancient philosophy, science, and magic.⁶⁵ In not condemning the bishop Cyril of

⁶² Hier. *Hilar.* 23: “...he went to Alexandria [...] and because he had never stayed in cities since he had become a monk, he diverted to some brethren that he knew in Brucheion, not far from Alexandria.” (*perrexit Alexandriam ... et quia numquam, ex quo coeperat esse monachus, in uribus manserat, divertit ad quosdam fratres notos sibi in Bruchio, haud procul ab Alexandria*). Based on the 21 manuscripts used by Morales in SC 508 (2007), 274–6 there is no variation of *Bruchio* in both instances where Jerome refers to it in this text (*Hilar.* 23.2/7). *PL* 23:47–8 (published in 1845 based on the eighteenth-century edition by Vallarsi), note 3, explains that despite all manuscripts containing *Bruchio* and the term being well known from Ammianus and elsewhere, previous editors have preferred the otherwise unknown *Brutio*. This may have contributed to the confusion.

⁶³ This is clear from Jerome’s other account, *Hilar.* 90 (*PL* 73:202C–203): Βρούχιον ... *mittunt Bruchium ... monasterium* (from Sophronius’ translation).

⁶⁴ Eus. *v.C.* 4.37, *Soz. h.e.* 1.18.

⁶⁵ Joh. Nik. 84.87–8, 100–103; *Socr. h.e.* 7.13–15.

Alexandria, who was held responsible for her death, John echoes the Alexandrians who named Cyril “the new Theophilus; for he had destroyed the last remains of idolatry in the city.” He also mentions that at this time “the orthodox inhabitants of Alexandria were filled with zeal and they collected a large quantity of wood and burned the place of the pagan philosophers” (perhaps a library or some other pagan institution).⁶⁶

From the age of Enlightenment to the nineteenth century, the narrative of Hypatia and Cyril has been used to show the alleged hostility of the Church against science.⁶⁷ Most famously, Edward Gibbon (1737–1794) gave an emotional account that suggested that Hypatia’s case could be taken as the prime example of Christian intolerance to other competing discourses, an intolerance which he argues substantially contributed to the downfall of the Roman Empire (chapter 47). More recent research, however, often emphasises the political motives impelling the murder of Hypatia. Dzielska, for example, argues that most Alexandrians not only tolerated but also respected Neoplatonic philosophers in the early fifth century, an argument that implies that Hypatia did not deviate from Neoplatonic philosophy.⁶⁸

The heightened circumstances surrounding Hypatia’s death suggest that religious motives played a significant part in the events: a fourth-century law had ruled that a range of persons involved in divination, including *mathematici*, were to be tortured in a similar way, to be stripped of their flesh.⁶⁹ Hypatia, in fact, was a highly distinguished mathematician and philosopher, a Neoplatonist who also mastered a broad range of philosophical authors and subjects.⁷⁰ But her Neoplatonic adversaries appear to have criticised her, calling her a mathematician rather than a (Neoplatonic) philosopher, and openly accusing her of indiscriminately teaching all philosophies.⁷¹ Between these two perspectives it is pos-

⁶⁶ Joh. Nik. 84.45 with Haas (1997), 469, note 81.

⁶⁷ See Dzielska (1995), 1–17.

⁶⁸ Dzielska (1995), 84.

⁶⁹ *Cod. Theod.* 9.16.6: *eculeo deditus unguisulque sulcantibus latera perferat poenas proprio dignas facinore* (addressed to the praetorian prefect of Italy and Africa); Rougé and Delmaire (2009), 47 note 2 (literature).

⁷⁰ Rist (1965). And see Shanzer (1985), too. According to *Socr. h.e.* 7.15.1, Hypatia succeeded to the school of Plato and Plotinus.

⁷¹ *Dam. Isid. fr.* 164 (Zintzen, 218): “Isidore and Hypatia were very different, not only as a man differs from a woman but as a philosopher differs from a mathematician.” (ὁ Ἰσίδωρος πολὺ διαφέρων ἢν τῆς Ὑπατίας, οὐ μόνον οἷα γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἷα γεωμετρικῆς τῷ ὄντι φιλόσοφος); Suid. s.v. Ὑπατία, 166 Adler: “She explained publicly to those who wished to hear either Plato or Aristotle or any other of the philosophers” (ἐξηγεῖτο δημοσίᾳ τοῖς ἀκροᾶσθαι βουλομένοις ἢ τὸν Πλάτωνα ἢ τὸν Ἀριστοτέλην ἢ ἄλλου ὅτου διὰ τῶν φιλοσόφων).

sible to surmise that she was perhaps nominally a Neoplatonic scholar, but one who actively undertook research that was more subversive to the Christian world view. Hypatia's works have therefore not survived.

To unravel the mystery, it is worth having a look at the letters written to Hypatia by her student Synesius, who later became bishop of Cyrene. A letter written by Synesius in 405 appears to allude to books in his private library that could arouse suspicion. Synesius of Cyrene can be taken as the prime example of a personality combining non-conflicting religious identities, as he unusually combined Christian and Neoplatonic thinking with a thorough knowledge and liberal handling of classical authors. Along with Hypatia, Synesius was a lifelong member of a circle of Alexandrians with whom he was initiated and shared in the mysteries of philosophy.⁷² In this letter, Synesius complained about “those in the white or dark mantle.”⁷³ He goes on to explain that those dressed in white are “sophists” (wearing the white mantle of the philosophers), a term apparently used here to describe Neoplatonic philosophers.⁷⁴ It is likely that those who wear the dark mantle are Christian theologians or monks.⁷⁵ Both groups accused him of deviance from *their* philosophy and of keeping unrevised books in his library:⁷⁶

They say I violate the laws of philosophy because I want to examine the beauty of style and rhythm and because I enjoy saying something about Homer and about rhetorical figures. In their eyes one must hate literature in order to be a philosopher and must study divine matters only. [...] Finally, it defends my library, which the same men accused because it conceals unrevised books. These spiteful persons have not even refrained from denigration.

⁷² On this circle, Bregman (1982), 19; Dzielska (1995), 59–60; Watts (2006), 195–6; Lacombrade (1994), 964 concludes: *zweifelsohne [hat es] bei den verbliebenen Heiden eine Geheimliteratur gegeben*.

⁷³ Synes. *ep.* 154.2–3: καὶ γὰρ τῶν ἐν λευκοῖς ἔνιοι τρίβωσι καὶ τῶν ἐν φαιοῖς.

⁷⁴ There is a debate on this, see Garzya and Roques (2000), 428–9, note 24, 27, 30. Yet, Synesius' allusions to the Platonic philosopher Xenocrates almost excludes any alternative suggestion.

⁷⁵ Synes. *ep.* 154.19–21: “Some of them [...] the readiest of all to lecture about God” (ἀλλ' ἐκείνων οἱ μὲν ... προχειρότατοι πάντων εἰσὶ περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ διαλέγεσθαι). Some, including Dzielska (1995), 61–2, understand those in the dark mantle as monks. Contra: Garzya and Roques (2000), 423, note 7. And see 426–7, note 20, on an overview of scholarly interpretations.

⁷⁶ Synes. *ep.* 154.3–8: ἔφασάν με παρανομεῖν εἰς φιλοσοφίαν, ἐπαίοντα κάλλους ἐν λέξει καὶ ῥυθμοῦ, καὶ περὶ Ὁμήρου τι λέγειν ἀξιούντα καὶ περὶ τῶν ἐν ταῖς ῥητορείαις σχημάτων, ὥς δὴ τὸν φιλόσοφον μισολόγον εἶναι προσήκον καὶ μόνον περιεργάζεσθαι τὰ δαιμόνια πράγματα. 62–5: τελευτῶν δὲ καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν κιβωτίων ἀπολελόγηται, σχόντων τινὰ καὶ τούτων αἰτίαν, ἀδιόρθωτα κρύπτειν βιβλία. οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδὲ τῶν τοιούτων οἱ τελεχίνες ἀπέσχοντο.

Commentators have thought that the books Synesius was alluding to had not been finished yet, hence they are “unrevised.”⁷⁷ This seems to be the same understanding of the term “unrevised” used in Cicero.⁷⁸ However, this understanding can be reviewed from the perspective of Alan Cameron’s investigation into the practice of subscriptions in the Christian period of the fourth century and later. Cameron notes that while in most cases subscriptions point to not more than proofreading against an exemplar, he also found some evidence of revisions certifying the correct expression of Christian faith.⁷⁹ This idea of revision is therefore closer to censorship than it was in the Ciceronian period. For Synesius, these unrevised copies could even be the object of serious accusation. The offence seems to have consisted of an affinity to Hellenism as a stylistic or religious-cultural category: “some of my poetical attempts seemed to them the work of an artist who reproduces the antique, as we are used to say about statues.”⁸⁰ In the same letter Synesius complains that a book, admired by Hellenists, disappeared from his library.⁸¹ To my mind, Synesius’ letter therefore indicates that he was worried about censorship of specifically pagan content in writing.

Within this context of censorship, the letter to Hypatia also indicates that different kinds of books were suitable to Christian and Neoplatonic philosophers as well as to pagans respectively: at the end, Synesius mentions his new book containing “a study on the whole imagination of the soul and on some other points which the Greek philosophers have not yet addressed.” He suggests that he sent Hypatia an unauthorised copy: “after myself you will be the first of the Greeks to have access to this work.”⁸² Synesius explicates that these “Greeks” are “philosophers and orators.”⁸³ The same letter notes that he sent to Hypatia another book, an astronomical treatise. At least one commentator has therefore considered the possibility that Synesius’ library contained papyrus rolls that were

⁷⁷ The argument is that Synesius was alluding to his *Dion* which he revised (Synes. *Dion* 16).

⁷⁸ Cic. *Att.* 13.21a: ἀδιόρθωτα.

⁷⁹ Alan Cameron (2011), chapter 12–14, esp. p. 432, 488.

⁸⁰ Synes. *ep.* 154.16–18: καὶ τινὰ τῶν ἐκ ποιητικῆς ἐπιμελῶς ἔχοντα καὶ παραδεικνύοντα τι τῆς ἀρχαίας χειρός, ὅπερ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀνδριάντων λέγειν εἰώθαμεν.

⁸¹ Synes. *ep.* 154.13–14.

⁸² Synes. *ep.* 154.101–4: ἔσκειπται δ’ ἐν αὐτῷ περὶ τῆς εἰδωλικῆς ἀπάσης ψυχῆς, καὶ ἕτερ’ ἅττα προκεχείρισται δόγματα τῶν οὕτω φιλοσοφηθέντων Ἑλλήσι. Synes. *ep.* 154.113–14: σὺ γὰρ δὴ μετ’ ἐμὲ πρώτη τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐντεύξει.

⁸³ Synes. *ep.* 154.92–3.

not yet copied on parchment and that contained works suspicious to Christian institutions which were only circulated as private copies as a result.⁸⁴

Synesius expressed similar concerns earlier in a letter written in Cyrene (Lybia) in c. 399, addressed to Herculian, a fellow student in Alexandria. Synesius admonishes Herculian of the Pythagorean custom to keep their knowledge secret from the mob. This admonition arises because Herculian has previously divulged “things which deserved to remain hidden”, something Synesius found out from certain people around Herculian who had asked him to explain the meaning of writings they had exchanged among each other: “But according to my custom I did not claim to them that I understood these writings, nor did I say that I recognised them.”⁸⁵ These writings contained what Synesius called “the mysteries of philosophy.”⁸⁶ As he explains in another letter, it is that which “we have seen with our own eyes, we have heard with our own ears” at Hypatia’s.⁸⁷ Apparently, his betrayal of a secret which had consisted in “collecting knowledge from all sides”,⁸⁸ had caused Herculian to leave Alexandria (*ep.* 137). Scholars have interpreted this secret differently, suggesting that it means theurgy,⁸⁹ diverse texts,⁹⁰ a Pythagorean number theory rather than Empedocles’ natural philosophy⁹¹ or astronomy combined with geometry and arithmetic.⁹² So delicate did Synesius consider this knowledge that he repeatedly worried that the letters and works they exchanged could be intercepted, stating his need to hand these over to a messenger they could trust.⁹³ This appears to be a common fear. The pagan grammarian Maximus of Madaura (in Numidia) also expressed his concern that his letter, addressed to Augustine and written prob-

84 Treu (1958), 118–19 ad Synes. *Dion* 16, refers to *ep.* 130, 266a and 154, 291d, where Synesius mentions the rolls and roll containers in his library (κιβώτιον, βιβλία) and the extension of his library in *ep.* 273.17, with Birt (1913), 322–7, 341–4, 363–4 and Porph. *Plot.* 19.

85 Synes. *ep.* 143.2–7: τὰ ἄξια κρύπτεσθαι ... ἀλλ’ ἡμεῖς τὸν ἡμέτερον τρόπον καὶ πρὸς αὐτοὺς οὔτε μετεποιήθημεν τῶν συγγραμμάτων οὔτ’ ἐπιγινώσκειν αὐτὰ ἔφαμεν.

86 Synes. *ep.* 143.33: τῶν φιλοσοφίας ὀργίων.

87 Synes. *ep.* 137.8–9: αὐτόπται γάρ τοι καὶ αὐτήκοοι γεγονάμεν τῆς γνησίας καθηγεμόνος τῶν φιλοσοφίας ὀργίων.

88 Synes. *ep.* 137.61–2: τὸ φρονεῖν ἀπανταχόθεν συλλέγοντες.

89 Alan Cameron (1993b), 50–51.

90 Dzielska (1995), 63.

91 Garzya and Roques (2000), 410, note 19.

92 Bregman (1982), 21 refers to Syn. *astrolab.* 4, 1581D–1584A: “disciplines which one can properly call a fixed canon of truth” (καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς ἀποδείξεις οὐκ ἀμφισβητησίμως πορεύεται, ἀλλ’ ὑπηρετίσι χρῆται γεωμετρία τε καὶ ἀριθμητικῇ, ὥς ἀστραβῇ τῆς ἀληθείας κανόνα τις εἰπὼν οὐκ ἂν ἀμάρτοι τοῦ πρέποντος). This means as opposed to the actual canon of writings studied at that time.

93 Synes. *ep.* 137.42–5; 141.12–18; 143.40–44.

ably in 390, could be intercepted, burnt or otherwise destroyed.⁹⁴ The reasons for such concerns were, obviously, that his letter defended paganism and ridiculed Christianity.

There is further information on the content of these suspicious writings at the end of letter 143: among the writings that Synesius and Herculian shared were an astronomical poem and some unexplained ancient fragment.⁹⁵ In another letter, Synesius reveals that he is hesitant to accept the beliefs that are disseminated to the uneducated, namely that the world is corruptible and perishing soon. He was thus close to the Christian author Philoponus (c. 490–570), who argued that the world is eternal and that the stars and planets move dynamically, but an anathema was imposed on him in 680.⁹⁶ While it must be noted that the evidence about suspicious writings exchanged between Synesius and others is scattered throughout his correspondence, it is reasonable to assume that these writings contained material that was offensive to Christianity and probably linked to physical explanations of the world.⁹⁷

Hypatia's astronomical research could be of interest to explain the mystery, but the evidence supporting such a view remains obscure to us. However, it is known that she worked on an edition of Claudius Ptolemy's *Almagest*, while her father Theon, the last member known from Alexandria's Museion, worked on a commentary of the *Almagest*.⁹⁸ She also maintained astrolabes for research on the stars. Ptolemy's *Almagest* famously interpreted the earth as the centre of the solar system and came to be accepted as the standard book on astronomy throughout the Middle Ages. Research in the early nineteenth and again in the twentieth century showed it to be a spectacular case of plagiarism as Ptolemy had borrowed earlier computations based on the heliocentric system, although he claimed to have used his own computations.⁹⁹ The idea that the earth is not the centre of the universe, but moves around in perpetual motion, weakens the likelihood that the world is perishing soon. Synesius' correspondence indicates that ideas such as these were discussed between Hypatia and her students and that notebooks containing these ideas were exchanged amongst them. In the next section we will see that Christian authors seem to have welcomed the destruction of pagan institutions also in the West.

⁹⁴ Aug. *ep.* 16.4: *hanc epistulam aliquorum furto detractam, flammis vel quolibet pacto perituram.*

⁹⁵ Synes. *ep.* 143.58: καὶ ἔστιν ἀρχαῖον.

⁹⁶ See Sorabij (1983), 202.

⁹⁷ Synes. *ep.* 105.98–100 with Siniossoglou (2008), 235. And see Watts (2005b), 446, too.

⁹⁸ Alan Cameron and Long (1993), 47–8.

⁹⁹ Newton (1977); Delambre (1819), lxviii.

6.4 The Sack of Rome

There are some other occasions where libraries or archives could perhaps have been destroyed in the context of raids or riots, but we cannot say that these buildings were destroyed deliberately in the context of book-burning.¹⁰⁰ This section will argue that there are some reasons to think that libraries or archives were destroyed during the sack of Rome in 410 and that Christian authors regarded this as an act of punishment for Rome's pagan past. This again illustrates the power of books and the specific view on book-burning in Late Antiquity.

The city of Rome was plundered by the Visigoths in 410 but for three days only. Although the city had long ceased to be the capital of the empire, this event was regarded as pivotal by many contemporaries as Rome had never been taken by enemies ever since its rise to power. The remaining pagans interpreted the downfall of Rome as an obvious indication that the Christian God was unable to live up to Rome's glorious pagan past, especially since the Visigoths were themselves Arian Christians. This event therefore led a number of Christian authors to defend Christianity from these charges. Orosius wrote his Christian apologetic history to respond that similar disasters had happened also in Rome's pagan past and that the current evils are not due to neglect of the old gods. Orosius is very short on the imperial period and also on the sack of Rome itself. While there is no evidence that either the Visigothic plunderers or locals deliberately destroyed pagan sites at this occasion, Orosius claims that lightning destroyed some monuments in Rome:¹⁰¹

At the same time lightning destroyed the city's most famous sites, which the enemies could not set on fire, so that no one should doubt that the enemies were given permission to chastise the proud, lascivious and blasphemous city.

The allegation that temples were destroyed by lightning may have been a strategy to assign actual acts of arson to divine power. Sharing this view with Augustine, Orosius described the destruction of certain buildings as welcome from a Christian apologetic standpoint. He may have been alluding to the legend that the Christian aristocratic lady Proba had admitted the Goths into the city. Ac-

100 On accidental destruction, Speyer (1981), 20–21. Justinian's archive in Constantinople had been destroyed by a fire but the reason is unknown: Greg. M. *ep.* 9.229 (CCSL 140A:810).

101 Oros. 7.39.18: *et ne quisquam forte dubitaret ad correptionem superbae lascivae et blasphemae civitatis hostibus fuisse permissum, eodem tempore clarissima urbis loca fulminibus diruta sunt quae inflammari ab hostibus nequiverunt.*

cording to Orosius' view, the destruction was meant to punish the Babylon of his day for its sins. It is intriguing that he compares this destruction to those caused by the Celtic invaders when Rome was sacked the only time before, in 387 BC, as well as to the fire during the principate of Nero in AD 64 because historical records were destroyed at both occasions.¹⁰² Tacitus notes that besides several temples and artwork, "the ancient and untainted monuments of writers of genius" were burnt in AD 64.¹⁰³ While Suetonius blames the fire on Nero, we do not know the actual cause.¹⁰⁴ Tacitus charges the Christians only with "hatred of humankind."¹⁰⁵ It is not implausible that these early Christians strongly disapproved of the sites destroyed. Some Christians were burnt alive, suggesting that the authorities actually blamed the fire on the Christians because the punishment of burning alive in retaliation for arson was traditional in Roman law.¹⁰⁶ At any rate, it is likely that books were destroyed in Rome at some point as a consequence of invasions because Cassiodorus in the sixth century was worried about this.¹⁰⁷

It is possible that Prudentius is alluding to the actual destruction of written records in his own days through metaphoric implication: in the *Hamartigenia*, he gives an unhistorical picture of the destruction of Sodom, in which archives were burnt. In context, the wife of Lot (who was rescued from Sodom) sinfully looks back to the burning city and is therefore petrified:¹⁰⁸

Lot, by contrast, kept his proposed vows unchanged once he started on his way, and did not look back to the city-walls which had crumbled to ashes like a lofty funeral-pyre, or to its burnt people and its people's traditions, its archives, courts, market-place, baths, hawkers, brothels, temples and theatres, the circus and its audience, and the mouldy taverns. The flames of Sodom enwrap all the people's activities in just fire and condemn them under the judgment of Christ.

102 Liv. 6.1.2. However, Roberts (1918), 55–65, followed by Speyer (1981), 16–17 argued that the sack of Rome affected only few, if any, temple archives.

103 Tac. *ann.* 15.41.1: *monumenta ingeniorum antiqua et incorrupta*.

104 Suet. *Nero* 38.

105 Tac. *ann.* 15.44.1: *odio humani generis*.

106 The Law of the Twelve Tables ruled arsonists to be burnt alive: *Leg. XII tab. fr.* 8.6 Crawford (= Gaius 1.4 ad legem XII tabularum; *dig.* 47.9.9). See Doer (1956).

107 Cassiod. *inst.* 2.5: *quem [sc. librum] in bibliotheca Romae nos habuisse atque studiose legisse retinemus. qui si forte gentili incursione sublati est, habetis hic Gaudentium Mutiani Latinum*.

108 Prud. *ham.* 756–64: *voti | propositum contra non commutabile servat | Loth ingressus iter nec moenia respicit alto | in cinerem conlapsa rogo populumque perustum | et mores populi tabularia iura forumque, | balnea propolas meritoria templa theatra, | et circum cum plebe sua maddidasque popinas. | quidquid agunt homines Sodomorum incendia iustus | ignibus involvunt et Christo iudice damnant*. Cf. Prud. *apoth.* 316.

The passage, which adds all specific locations, institutions and buildings to the biblical passage (Gen. 19:24–9), can easily be identified as a veiled criticism of contemporary Rome by inference (for example, because of the circus). It is often assumed that Prudentius had completed most of his works in 404/5 when he wrote the preface to the *Cathemerinon* which the manuscripts place at the very beginning of his works, but there is no specific allusion to the *Hamar-tigenia* within this preface. It is therefore interesting that Orosius compares the absence of pope Innocent from Rome during the siege to Lot's absence from Sodom.¹⁰⁹ In Prudentius' interpretation, the destruction of Sodom thus also seems to have prefigured the destruction of Rome.¹¹⁰ To my mind, there is no other way to explain this analogy because Orosius clearly wrote after 410. If my interpretation is correct, then this would mean that Prudentius did actually witness the siege of Rome in 410 or was notified of this event. Scholars have so far agreed that he did not mention this event and had therefore died before that year because of his silence on this. At any rate, this interpretation helps to understand Augustine's view that Babylon (that is Rome) had been justly punished, as we have seen in section 4.4, and it supports the assumption that archives or libraries could have been destroyed by this time. Constantinople, however, continued to be a scholarly centre long after these events.

6.5 The Library of Constantinople

The imperial library of Constantinople, the last large library known from Antiquity, was mostly a foundation by the pagan emperor Julian, based on earlier collections of his predecessors.¹¹¹ Because Constantinople continued to be a centre for the literary traditions of the past, the fate of its library had an obvious impact on the preservation of literature from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages. In 475, a fire destroyed the imperial library of Constantinople, supposedly along with 120,000 books. The twelfth-century Byzantine historian Zonaras gives this figure for its collection and refers to a detailed fifth-century source, written by Malchus but lost today, to support his claim, but figures in ancient texts need to be generally treated with caution. The tenth-century Byzantine encyclopedia

¹⁰⁹ Oros. *hist.* 7.39.2: *ut beatus Innocentius, Romanae urbis episcopus, tamquam iustus Loth subtractus a Sodomis occulta providentia Dei apud Ravennam tunc positus, peccatoris populi non videret excidium.* Cf. Aug. *urb. exc.* 2 (CCSL 46:252).

¹¹⁰ Prud. *ham.* 723–5: *accipe gestarum monumenta insignia rerum, | praelusit quibus historia spectabile signum. | Loth fugiens Sodomis...*

¹¹¹ See Wilson (1980).

Suda also has an entry on this source, mentioning the fire in the library.¹¹² While some scholars assume that the library contained papyri rolls, others more reasonably assume the figure largely refers to parchment codices as the newer more voluminous book forms.¹¹³ The content of this library could therefore have been close to that of Alexandria.

Speyer categorises this and the following destructions as caused by war and violence.¹¹⁴ But Zonaras, the only source for the destruction does not in fact explicitly say what caused the fire. However, he writes that the interim emperor Basiliscus (475–476) was a non-conformist Christian, opposed to the council of Chalcedon, and tried to damage the orthodox Church. As a result, he was openly hated by the orthodox population.¹¹⁵ This and not the civil war with Zeno in 476 is the only indication in the source of what could possibly have caused the fire. It is therefore possible that the library could have been accidentally destroyed during the riot. Zonaras continues that the fire also consumed certain statues of goddesses (Juno, Minerva, Venus). This may be an indication that the fire occurred during the religious riot. When Zeno returned as emperor, welcomed by the orthodox population, he seems to have provided some justification for the fire, when he condemned Pelagius, senator and author of a history work and of poetry, of “Hellenism.”¹¹⁶

Zonaras and other authors from the ninth century onwards further report that the iconoclastic emperor Leo III in 726 destroyed 36,500 secular and theological books contained in the new library of Constantinople, but this could be a biased account because texts about the Iconoclastic Period are generally hostile and unreliable.¹¹⁷ It has been assumed that the library was destroyed again in 1204, when the crusaders plundered Constantinople, and yet again in

112 Zonar. *epit. hist.* 14.2.8–11; Suid. s.v. Μάλχος, 120 Adler. And see *AP* 16.70, too.

113 Mango (2002), 220: “not an impossible figure if those were mostly rolls”; Hunger (1961), 65–6: probably codices. Alan Cameron (2011), 426: “must have been codexes”, based on *Cod. Theod.* 14.9.2 and *Them. or.* 4.59d–60c.

114 Speyer (1981), 20.

115 Zonar. *epit. hist.* 14.2.8–11. The fourteenth century author Ephraem, *hist. chron.* 1002–14, also mentions that the fire destroyed the 120,000 books of the library. Wendel (1942), 208, assumes that the 120,000 books were pagan books, but that the 36,500 books in the second library were theological and, to a lesser extent, secular books.

116 Zonar. *epit. hist.* 14.2.29; Theoph. *AM* 5982–3; Cedr. (Bekker 1:621–2).

117 Zonar. *epit. hist.* 15.3.13–22; Cedr. (Bekker 1:795–6); Michael Glycas, *ann.* 4, P. 281C–D (*PG* 158:524D–525A). On other cases of book-burning in the iconoclastic period, Averil Cameron (2007), 11, 16–17. On the extensive production of polemical writings during this period, Averil Cameron (1994). John of Damascus, for example, labelled Epicureanism a heresy because it did not accept divine providence: Jo. D. *haer.* 8 (*PG* 94:684B).

1453 when the Turks sacked the city. However, it is not firmly known that the imperial library continued to exist at all after Late Antiquity.¹¹⁸ As to the Turkish conquest of Constantinople, the contemporary Dukas says only that the Turks sold precious manuscripts both in the West and in the East and that they destroyed some of the gospels which were adorned with gold and silver and sold others. This does not mean that the manuscripts were taken from the imperial library. A letter from the 15th July of 1453 addressed to the pope Nicholas V, mentions that 120,000 codices perished, but this is most likely a second-hand and speculative figure that seems to be based on the first destruction of the library in 475. In fact, the letter is extant only as quoted by the seventeenth-century scholar Humphrey Hody, who gives no direct quotation of this passage (only of the rest of the letter).¹¹⁹ The Turkish conquest of Constantinople may therefore have contributed to the re-circulation of Greek texts in the West rather than to the loss of texts.

6.6 Conclusion

It is therefore possible that books stored in temples or other public religious buildings (including gymnasia) did not survive the Christianisation of the Roman Empire, especially when it is considered that these buildings were often abandoned or even razed to the ground. However, while the evidence for temple destruction is often unclear, the evidence for the deliberate destruction of buildings containing books is even scantier. There are reports that a library was destroyed in Antioch under Jovian, but the sources attested to this event are late and unreliable. On the balance of probability, books were probably destroyed when the Serapeum of Alexandria was demolished in the age of Theodosius. However, the primary object targeted was the temple rather than its books, and this occurred in the context of a major riot in Alexandria rather than a concerted public policy. The different groups that dominated the cultural life in Alexandria had religious reservations against books that were offensive to Christianity, as we have seen in the correspondence between Synesius and Hypatia. There is evidence to suggest that a few other large libraries of Antiquity were destroyed in the context of religious riots, but the evidence is not conclusive. Although there is no clear indication that books were destroyed deliberately during the

¹¹⁸ Queller and Madden (1997), 291, note 19.

¹¹⁹ Krumbacher (1897), 506 refers to Dukas, *Historia Byzantina* 42 (Bekker, 312), with Greek text, and to the letter by Laurus Quirinus in Hodus, *De Graecis illustribus* (London, 1742): *ait se a cardinale Rutheno accepisse, ultra centum viginti millia librorum volumina fuisse devastata.*

sack of Rome in 410, it is interesting to note that some Christian authors described these destructions as justified and welcome from an apologetical standpoint. The need to justify the destruction and the arguments used by Christian authors illuminate the power that books had at that time as well as their link to the demonical past of the Roman Empire, a view that I have presented in the previous chapters. In the next chapter we will see that some of these attitudes continued to exist in the centuries to follow.

7 The Post-Roman Successor States

After the fall of the Roman Empire pagan books were hardly accessible. This was a time of radical transformation from a written to an oral culture in Western Europe. Cities fell into decay as the masses and elites alike came to dwell on estates in the countryside. While the Latin language (unlike Greek) continued to be spoken in Rome's former provinces for a while, the literary culture was largely reduced to monasteries as the remaining places of liberal studies. The most important scholars now were Christians, and the bulk of them were clerics, responsible for textual preservation and transmission. After the abolition of the imperial tax system there was a growing poverty among the aristocrats who increasingly lost interest to invest in luxury items such as books. There was no longer any state funding for teachers, and people ceased to be interested in paying towards their education in a period characterised by invasions, warlords and political instability. We will see in this chapter that books continued to be occasionally destroyed, that there was little interest in preserving any pagan literature and that the polemical discourse of late antique Christian authors probably influenced censorship legislation and decisions as to which books to copy or not to copy.

I shall first give a survey of extant testimonials for book-burning up until the early medieval period, but focussing on the period up to the seventh century. My argument is that there is evidence for remaining pagan groups which were acquainted with literary and philosophical traditions otherwise thought to be lost and that these groups were concerned about missionary activities having to do with the ejection of their literary heritage. I shall also argue that pagan books discovered by coincidence were prone to destruction at that time because of the demonical power that continued to be associated with ancient texts. I shall then discuss the educational requirements for bishops in ecclesiastical legislation of the post-Roman period, arguing that there is no firm evidence that bishops were required to receive a classical education or to be acquainted with any classical text but that on the contrary clerical education should be confined to biblical studies, while classical texts were frowned upon among clerics and monks. In this context, Isidore of Seville is an important author because his works tell us a great deal about attitudes towards classical texts and ancient philosophies and because he gives interesting insights into monastic book production at that time. This leads us to the final section, in which I shall argue that this legislation and these attitudes had a discernible effect on the transmission of classical texts in the period between 550 and 750. This can be best appreciated by investigating the so-called *membra disiecta*, single books that were produced from multiple older books, which were deleted in the process.

In the context of the overall argument of this book, it is worth noting that this time period was pivotal for the transmission of classical texts in the Latin West because texts that were available by the end of the eighth century usually survived until today. This chapter will therefore illuminate the ways in which clerics and ascetics vying for authority dealt with the ideas of others, those of their contemporaries or those masters who lived long ago. It will show that by this time they often drew on the authority of the texts and ideas that I have presented in the previous chapters.

7.1 Burning and Confiscation of Books after the Fall of Rome

So far I have discussed the instances for book-burning in hagiographical texts of the East in Chapter 3, in which I have argued that monks and ascetics conducted house searches to identify and destroy forbidden texts, often with the help of local state authorities, in order to provide miracle-healing to the Christian population and to encourage conversion. I will now address how the practice of book-burning arises and figures in the Latin hagiographical texts from the successor kingdoms in Western Europe, arguing that missionaries could burn books in order to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity and to defeat demons.

Many Latin Lives of Saints were written in the Middle Ages, few in Late Antiquity. Nevertheless, monasticism and religious legislation developed similarly in East and West, suggesting productive parallels can be drawn. For example, the sixth-century *Life of Caesarius of Arles* (c. 470–542) has its hero dreaming of a secular knowledge book transformed into a dragon chewing his arm.¹ The day before, his teacher had given young Caesarius what probably was a grammar book. He seems to be putting forward the view that secular knowledge was difficult to acquire and not needed anymore for a successful life. It is also obvious that he was concerned about the demon that dwelt in this book. Perhaps he had read some lines that aroused the demon of his sexuality and he therefore fantasised about the book as a dragon. Caesarius, however, did not shun books. In fact, he criticised other book owners of his age, including religious people, for keeping their valuable books locked in their cupboards and not reading them or giving them to others to read. He intimates that this is because of the “obsta-

1 *Vita Caesarii* 1.9. (MGH SS rer. Merov. 3:460): *saecularis scientia*.

cles of this world.”² This seems to indicate that book-owners regarded reading books, even Christian books, as too much of a leisure activity; and perhaps they wanted to avoid suspicion, depending on the content of the books in question. Like the *Life of Caesarius*, medieval hagiographical texts deploy the literary topoi of holy men fighting against dragons or serpents. The origins of these topoi are often unknown to us, but they seem to represent the battle against paganism and its material culture (as demons), and even against subversive literary genres or books.

Let us have a closer look at the two earliest lives of Patrick, the late fifth-century patron saint of Ireland. Legend today has it that Patrick drove all serpents from Ireland. This is an allusion to the biblical book of Exodus, where Moses and Aaron perform a miracle in front of the Pharaoh. Aaron’s staff turns into a snake that swallows all snakes summoned by the wise men and magicians at Pharaoh’s court.³ Other biblical passages use Aaron’s staff as a figure for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit that needs to be protected against rebellion.⁴ This metaphor seems therefore to derive from Patrick’s missionary activities that I shall outline shortly.

Patrick was an important missionary to Ireland. Ireland had never been a province of the Roman Empire and therefore lacked historical record and the degree of civilisation of the provinces. As the history of Ireland during this period remains obscure, much of what was written about Patrick in the early Middle Ages is therefore supposition. Nevertheless, his story represents the ongoing engagement of Christian missionaries with Irish pagans and pagan warlords. Two texts from the seventh century (by Muirchú and Tírechán), contained in the Book of Harmagh, describe the deeds of Patrick largely as a battle against magicians, a theme borrowed from the apocryphal *Acts of the Apostles* of Pseudo-Abdias.⁵ For example, when the “magician” (*magus*) Locru had a philosophical discussion with Patrick, a stone miraculously dashes the magician’s brains out in what seems to be retaliation for intellectual challenge.⁶ These texts can be seen as emblematic for the social and cultural conflicts at the time of composition and it is therefore striking that the difference between true and false philosophies contin-

2 Caes. Arel. *serm.* 2 (Délage, 278–80): *multi sunt, et forte aliqui religiosi, qui plures libros et satis nitidos et pulchre ligatos habere volunt, et eos ita armariis clausos tenent, ut illos nec ipsi legant, nec aliis ad legendum tribuant: ignorantes quod nihil prodest libros habere, et eos propter mundi huius inpedimenta non legere.*

3 Exod. 7:8–13.

4 Num. 17:8, Heb. 9:4.

5 See O’Leary (1996), 290–301 on repercussions between Muirchú and Pseudo-Abdias.

6 Muirchu, *vita Patricii* 1.17.6.

ued to be of interest in the seventh century within the context of missionary activities.

In the rhetoric of his hagiographers, Patrick's mission was not simply a physical struggle, but an intellectual one that centred on the battle of books. Engaged in another contest now with the "magician" Lucetmail, advisor of king Loegaire, Patrick offered to throw the books of each party into water or fire in order to persuade the king of the superiority of his faith: "Throw your books into the water, and him whose books remain unharmed, we shall adore."⁷ Patrick then ordained a bishop in the region and invested him with Christian books.⁸ To the population, books were powerful symbols and it can be persuasively argued that this informs the missionaries' desire to make sure that they remained exclusive to them. As such, it is no surprise that the seventh-century Lives of Patrick give the impression that the missionaries have selectively destroyed books to persuade the multitude of the primacy of their faith.

Scholars identify these magicians with druids, but the evidence for this assumption is scanty and the Irish word *druí* for *magus* is blurred.⁹ Julius Caesar wrote that Celtic druids considered it a sacrilege to commit their doctrine to writings.¹⁰ Unless later druids deviated from their ancient ways, there was nothing to destroy then, if indeed there were any druids on the British Isles after the Roman period given that the Romans largely eradicated druidism as a *superstitio* in the areas they occupied. Muirchú describes Loegaire's magicians in words that are similar to those used in the *Codex Theodosianus*: "magicians, enchanter, fortune-tellers, and inventors, or rather doctors, of every evil art", who came together at Tara, "their Babylon."¹¹ Muirchú mentions two of these individuals who prophesised that Christian missionaries will eject their works of art:¹²

7 Muirchu, *vita Patricii* 1.20.8–9: *libros vestros in aquam mittite, et illum cuius libri inlessi evaserunt adorabimus*. O'Leary (1996), 298–301 sees a similarity with apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, particularly with Hermogenes in Pseudo-Abdias, *Passion of James* (see section 3.6 above), because of the water motive. This is perhaps too general an allusion.

8 Tirechan, *vita Patricii* 42.6: *exustus est ante faciem omnium in vindictae signum*, 42.7.

9 Charles-Edwards (2000), 195, note 55 refers to O'Brien (1962), 279: "Simon *magus* is *Símón druí*."

10 Caes. *Gall.* 6.14.3: [*Druides*] *neque fas esse existimant ea litteris mandare, cum in reliquis fere rebus, publicis privatisque rationibus, Graecis utantur litteris*. Cf. 6.13.11–12: Druids travel from Gaul to Britain for instruction.

11 Muirchu, *vita Patricii* 1.15.2: *magis, incantatoribus, auruspibus et omnis artis omnisque doli inventoribus doctoribusve ... istorum Babylone*. Cf. *Cod. Theod.* 9.16.4; 16.10.12.

12 Muirchu, *vita Patricii* 1.10.4: *morem quandam exterum futurum in modum regni cum ignota quadam doctrina molesta longinquo trans maria advectum, a paucis dictatum, a multis suscep-*

A certain foreign way of life will come, a kingdom, as it were, with a certain unknown and burdensome doctrine, imported from far beyond the sea, dictated by few, endured by many, to be honoured by all, to overthrow kingdoms, to kill the kings who resisted, seduce the crowds, to destroy all their gods, and, having ejected all their works of art, to reign forever.

Because it separates the “works of art” from the destruction of gods, these works may well refer to books and the “gods” to cult statues. It is therefore pertinent that among these “magicians”, the author goes on citing one of their poems, also were poets, with one of them ordained as bishop after conversion.¹³ This shows that the missionaries had access to the works written by this group. This group has also been identified with a group of scholars mentioned in the Leyden Glossary, which contains a surprising note, probably from the sixth or seventh century, explaining that learned men fled from Gaul to Ireland as a consequence of the invasions:¹⁴

From them [the Huns] the destruction of the whole empire took its beginning, and it was finalised by Huns and Vandals, Goths and Alans, at whose devastation all the wise men on this side of the sea took flight, and in transmarine parts, namely in Ireland and wherever they betook themselves, brought along the highest degree of progress in wisdom to the inhabitants of those regions.

The letters of Sidonius Apollinaris and other contemporary testimonials also account for the difficulties of teachers to make their living in view of the invasions in fifth-century Gaul. In a letter from the 470s, Sidonius Apollinaris bewails the abolition of scholarship and encourages the grammarian John to continue “as the only scholar in this time of wars”, charging him to take care of the Latin language.¹⁵ Although Sidonius is flattering John, this indicates that grammarians had become rare because of the military, civil, and cultural turmoil that ensued when Gaul finally ceased to be part of the Roman Empire.

The *Hisperica famina* is an interesting source that may allow us to identify the magicians in the *Lives of Patrick* with pagan immigrants. Umberto Eco’s

tum, ab omnibus honorandum, regna subversum, resistentes reges occisurum, turbas seducturum, omnes eorum deos distructurum, et iectis omnibus illorum artis operibus in saecula regnaturum.

13 Muirchu, *vita Patricii* 1.19.3: *poeta*.

14 *Et ab his depopulatio totius imperii exordium sumpsit, quae ab Unis et Guandalis Gotis et Alanis peracta est, sub quorum vastatione omnes sapientes cismarini fugam ceperunt et in transmarinis videlicet in Hibernia et quocumque se receperunt, maximum profectum sapientiae incolis illarum regionum adhibuerunt.* The Latin text is found in Müller (1866), 389; And see Kenney (1929), 142–3 for a commentary (who thinks an “exodus on a considerable scale” is reasonably evidenced by the sources).

15 Sidon. *ep.* 8.2.1 (*MGH Auct. ant.* 8:127): *uno magistro sub hanc tempestate bellorum.*

novel *The Name of the Rose* (1980) mentions this work alongside a letter by Aldhelm of Malmesbury (the one discussed further below) among the poisoned books in the mysterious monastic library, indicating that its content is pertinent to the survival of classical literatures. It is believed that the *Hisperica famina* (a Hiberno-Latin collection of poems) was written in the seventh century, perhaps earlier, in Ireland or Britain.¹⁶ Cardinal Angelo Mai, the palimpsest hunter, first edited the text from a Vatican manuscript of unknown origin in 1833. Written in a bucolic style, the poem accounts for the daily life of a scholarly group in Ireland with foreign origin (A9), which like the magicians in the Lives of Patrick engage in scholarly contests. Like its author, the scholars of the *Hisperica famina* speak Latin, whereas the other people around them speak Irish (A271–4). Their choice of topics seems to imply that the scholars were worried about Christian missionaries. Herren suggested that its unknown author belonged to a group of remaining pagans.¹⁷ This is an obvious interpretation as the text mentions pagan gods like Phoebus throughout; it also mentions that sacred trees were cut (A62–3, 185–9) and refers to natural philosophers in an unpolemical context, within a catalogue of explanations for natural phenomena. The term *phisici* (A378, A484), not unlike *mathematici*, is ambiguous and may refer to astrologers and physicians, but natural philosopher is the commonest meaning and it is one that fits the context, clearly pointing to non-orthodox authorship. The poem also apparently parodies the Second Coming of Christ (A561–70) and the B-text includes a page on the “sphere of Pythagoras”, which is clearly of pagan character.¹⁸ It is worth quoting a passage which highlights the antagonism between missionaries and Latin scholarly groups that had long ago migrated from Italy:¹⁹

¹⁶ Roth (1978).

¹⁷ Herren (1974), 39–40.

¹⁸ Jenkinson (1908), 31.

¹⁹ *Hisperica famina* A49–71, 114–15: *sed presto horrendus asstat chelidrus, | qui talem vipereo ictu sauciat turbam, | nisi vasti exigerint rectorem poli | qui florigerum agmen reguloso solverit discrimine. | novello temporei globaminis cyclo | hispericum arripere ttonui sceptrum; | ob hoc rudem scemico logum | ac exiguus serpit per ora rivus. | quodsi amplo temporalis aevi stadio | Ausonica me alligasset catena, | sonoreus faminis per guttura populariet haustus, | ac immensus urbani tenoris manasset faucibus tollus. | quod profriferum plasmas orgium? | utrum alma scindis securibus robora, | uti eo quadrigona densis scemicares oratoria tabulatis? | an flamigero coctas obrizum clibano, | auriferas solidis cudere lunulas marthellis? | seu tinolam tensis suscitatas odam chordis? | forte concavas sonoreis proflas cicutas armoniis; | sed non intelligibili mentis acumine prestulor | quod lanigerosas odorosa observas per pascua bidentium turmas, | qui obessa arcatorum assiduo tramite sectaris concilia, | ac ciciniam gemellis baiulas curvanam scapulis ... ac furibundus teneram superat ursus bidentem, | intantum nostra loquelosi tenoris segregantur altrin-*

But nearby lurks a scary serpent, which will hurt this group [of scholars: *arcati*, A44] with its poisonous strike, unless they request the ruler of the vast sky to release this flourishing crowd from this kingly battle. In the latest cycle of this time sphere I was able to seize the Latin sceptre. Therefore, I fashion an uneducated speech, and a scanty stream sneaks through my mouth. But if for a long course of time-duration the Italian chain had bound me, a breath of sweet-sounding speech would be alive in my throat, and an unmeasurable river of sophisticated sound would flow from my mouth. What secret rite of your own do you build up? Do you cut down the fertile oaks with axes in order to fashion square houses of prayer with massive planks? Or do you cook gold in a flaming pan in order to forge golden crescents with solid hammers? [cf. Apoc. 12:1] Or do you raise a jingly song on stretched strings? Perhaps you blow jingly melodies into the hollow hemlock. But with my acuteness of mind I expect that you tend woolly flocks of sheep in fragrant pastures, and in your persistent manner hunt out the foolish assemblies of the scholars, carry a swan-white bag on your two shoulders [...] and as much as the raging bear is stronger than the tender sheep, so much different are our spirits of eloquence on the other side.

The passage refers to two groups: the we-group, scholars that were famous in the West a long time ago who were harassed by the other group in or around this period. The other group builds chapels from the trees they cut and melts gold in the fire. This may be read as an allusion to the melting and recycling of cult statues. Both are activities that characterise Christian missionaries of the time. The sceptre alludes to the philosopher's staff²⁰ or Aaron's staff and generally (I suggest) to the supremacy of pagan education in the past. The serpent-metaphor here represents the Christian group, in an inverted rhetoric. The motif of the sheep and its accompanying rhetoric seem to refer to Christians, who are led by Jesus the Good Shepherd. Finally, the "kingly battle" corresponds to the "kingdom" of Christianity in the prophecy quoted further above. The *Hisperica famina* thus confirms the idea that there was a battle between true and false (or "foolish") philosophies.

It is not clear which group was responsible for the past violent attacks depicted at the end of the passage (A571–612). They are simply called *latrunculi* (A573, 595, "robbers"). These could be missionaries or pirates. The intruders kill a boar and roast it on a fire made from a huge oak they have felled. This oak was perhaps a sacred tree because in retaliation the natives fight back but are violently defeated. The intruders then return and tell stories and invent fables

secus numina. Herren (1974, p. 69) translates *curvana* as booksack, but the meaning is not clear (p. 137, 194). It is described at length as a container used by the scholars in A513–50, but no books are mentioned. Archaeological finds show that early Christian book satchels in Ireland were of black or dark colour: Roth (1978), 118–19.

²⁰ Mart. 10.62.10.

about their deeds.²¹ This could point to the dissemination of hagiographical tales. I suggest that the *Hisperica famina* originated from works that were confiscated in the context of missionary activities. Herren is therefore probably right to speculate that the end of Hisperic scholarship in the seventh century, as represented by the *Hisperica famina*, was caused by outright suppression.²²

Is there other evidence for the survival of ancient philosophical traditions on the British Isles? Contrary to a popular opinion it is not firmly attested that Irish monks had access to any classical texts before the Carolingian Renaissance. The first surviving copy of a substantial collection of classical texts dates from the ninth or tenth century (Berne 363). Scholars today agree that the Christian authors who did quote from or allude to the classics probably gleaned their knowledge from handbooks or from earlier studies on the continent.²³

After Lachmann's early edition (1850), Duvau and other scholars have assumed that a copy, now lost, of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, may have originated in England or Ireland perhaps in the seventh century and that it became the intermediary for the archetype of the earliest extant manuscript. This assumption is based on the fact that the two oldest surviving manuscripts (O and Q) contain a number of insular abbreviations (for *quae* and *quoniam*) and of scribal errors typical for an insular intermediary. Brown has doubted this old hypothesis because the text is not attested in any insular catalogue. She also argued that these scribal errors can alternatively be explained as accidental mistakes and that the abbreviations may be due to the insular education of the scribe because Bischoff had since identified the corrector of O with Dungal, an Irishman who migrated to the court of Charlemagne. Brown is therefore correct to dismiss the possibility that O was directly dependent from a lost insular archetype, but she agreed that an intermediary between the late Roman copy and the archetype existed, although she concluded that it is best "possibly [...] to give preference to an intermediary in Carolingian minuscles."²⁴ However, Brown assumed that only one scribe copied O, whereas two different scribes were in fact involved in copying this oldest surviving manuscript and it is therefore unlikely that the different scribes of O and Q shared the same preference for insular

²¹ *Hisperica famina* A611–12: "Then retreating to their home soil on a backward way the inhabitants narrate a wealth of tales" (*hinc reduci tramite paternum remeantes in solum | fabulosam exprimunt accolae soriam*).

²² Herren (1974), 43.

²³ See Herren (1996), 1–39, based on Bieler.

²⁴ Brown (1968); Butterfield (2013), 24–5 on other scholars who posited the existence of an insular copy.

abbreviations.²⁵ On the contrary, it is clear that the lost archetype of O and Q already included these insular abbreviations. The identification of the corrector of O has therefore little relevance to the question of whether or not the scribe who copied the archetype had used insular abbreviations that were not included in the hyperarchetype (the assumed insular intermediary). The established view that the manuscript tradition of Lucretius is of insular origin can therefore not be ruled out.

Scholars have so far not taken into account the evidence discussed above, although it supports the assumption that a copy of Lucretius may have circulated on the British Isles. If it circulated among any group of pagan scholars on the British Isles, then it is clear that the text is not attested in any monastic catalogue. Lucretius is recorded in continental catalogues (without a title) not before the ninth century. As I shall argue in the final section, it is unlikely that this text would have been copied in monasteries before the Carolingian Renaissance. The scholars mentioned in the *Hisperica famina* may have had direct or indirect knowledge of Lucretius' poem as the text itself mentions the possibility that scholars at that time were instructed in texts, perhaps without themselves owning a copy.²⁶

We have seen that the authors of the *Hisperica famina* mention natural philosophers as their associates and cover a range of themes on natural phenomena similar to Lucretius, such as the sky (A358–80), the sea (A381–425), fire (A426–50) and wind (A477–96). While these themes occur in Isidore's *De natura rerum*, I have found a number of motifs that suggest knowledge of Lucretius' rather than Isidore's text.²⁷ Because the *Hisperica famina* is not written in hexameter, there are no verbal allusions to any Latin poem, but because of the similarity of motifs it is clear that its authors were acquainted with some classical poems.²⁸ For example, both texts explain that rainbows are caused by the refraction of sun light in the rain,²⁹ that a strong wind destroys trees and beats upon the sea³⁰ and that

²⁵ Butterfield (2013), 203, note 1.

²⁶ *Hisperica famina* A20: *quos edocetis fastos?*

²⁷ Herren (1974), 20, 22 thinks it is possible that the author(s) of the *Hisperica famina* had used Isidore's *De natura rerum* as a source mainly because both texts use *orion* as a word for star, but this is not a strong indication for intertextuality.

²⁸ On acquaintance with Vergil, Herren (1974), 20, 24–6.

²⁹ *Hisperica famina* A373: *multiformis solifluis pretenui nubium vapore scemicatur arcus radiis*; Lucr. 6.524–6: *haec ubi sol radiis tempestatem inter opacam | adversa fulsit nimborum aspargine contra, | tum color in nigris existit nubibus arqui*. Cf. Isid. *nat.* 31.1 (Becker, 57–8).

³⁰ *Hisperica famina* A477–82; Lucr. 1.271–89; 6.137–41. This is unparalleled in Isidore. Both A479 and Lucr. 1.275 use the rare word *fabris*.

the sea encircles the shores of the earth.³¹ Moreover, the passage mentioned above indicates that the missionaries expected the pagan scholars to accept the kingly rule of God as the “the ruler of the vast sky”, while Lucretius wrote that people concede the kingly rule to the divine if they are ignorant of the natural causes of the functioning of the sky.³² Finally, Herren has identified a large number of unusual suffixes that frequently appear in the *Hisperica famina* and that can often be traced back to the language used by Lucretius.³³ As the *Hisperica famina* indicates, these pagan scholars had a sufficient command of the Latin language and they could have acquired Lucretius’ text from Italy, their country of origin.

Moreover, it is known that Dungal (who apparently was the only annotator able to clearly understand the text) bequeathed to the monastery of Bobbio a number of books of insular origin.³⁴ To my mind, Bishoff’s identification of the corrector of O with Dungal can as well be interpreted as supporting the existence of an insular copy of Lucretius. Dungal was a poet and astronomer from Ireland and probably also a bishop. He explained to Charlemagne the double solar eclipse of 810 and it is plausible that he got his knowledge from Lucretius because he seems to have corrected the pertinent passages in Lucretius dealing with that subject matter.

An obscure letter by Aldhelm (d. 709), abbot of Malmesbury, gives some further evidence for pagan philosophical studies in Ireland of the late seventh century. Aldhelm was well-educated at the school of Canterbury and imported books from Rome. In this letter, Aldhelm warned the Christian Wihthfrith to travel to Ireland for the purpose of studying at people that he calls *philosophi*. Instead, he should respect his orthodox faith by reading only the Bible. He calls these philosophers “garrulous frogs” and says that their studies on gods and goddesses (among others he mentions Helen and Orestes) are similarly immoral as visiting prostitutes in Ireland.³⁵ At any rate, it is clear that terms like *philosophi* or *magi* are labels with which to refer to either unbaptised people or possibly heretics.

31 *Hisperica famina* A383: *hoc spumans mundanas obvallat pelagus oras*; Lucr. 6.631–2: *postremo quoniam raro cum corpore tellus | et coniunctast, oras maris undique congenis*.

32 Lucr. 6.50–55: *cetera quae fieri in terris caeloque tuentur | mortales, pavidis cum pendent mentibu’ saepe, | et faciunt animos humilis formidine divom | depressosque premunt ad terram propterea quod | ignorantia causarum conferre deorum | cogit ad imperium res et concedere regnum*.

33 Herren (1974), 195–216.

34 Bieler (1949), 279.

35 Aldhelm, *ep.* 3 (MGH Auct. ant. 15:479): *garrulitas lanarum*.

Aldhelm also admonished Heahfrith to respect orthodoxy after he returned from studies in Ireland.³⁶ In the opening lines of this letter, he mentions a serpent, “vomiting contagious poison through the ages”, and he adds that temples as the dwelling places of this serpent have been eradicated and replaced with churches.³⁷ The serpent seems to be alluding to studies in Ireland because Aldhelm was aware that one could study “physical instruments” besides grammar and geometry in Ireland.³⁸ This knowledge they “strictly conceal to be preserved until death in consideration.”³⁹ This implies that there was a group of scholars who shared and transmitted secret knowledge, probably of a scientific or forbidden nature. Despite the obscurity of this text, it is not impossible that the group of scholars who transmitted this knowledge could be related to those who authored the *Hisperica famina*.

Patrick himself, in his own writings, appears to mention a group of Latin pagan scholars, suggesting that there was a historical basis for his fight against the magicians. In his *Confession*, the holy man boasts of having become an important missionary despite his unlearned background: “Listen and pay close attention, you rhetoricians who you are unaware of the Lord!”⁴⁰ These rhetoricians could be related to the *rhetori* mentioned several times in the *Hisperica famina* as a group different from, but related to the poets who composed the *Hisperica famina* (A8, 21, 476, 546).

The exact nature of these rhetoricians, however, is open to interpretation and has been discussed most extensively by Bradley. First, the interpretation is dependent on the reading of “unaware of the Lord” (*domini ignari*). The manuscripts offer several different readings, among which the most significant is *domini cati* (“learned in the Lord”). Bradley convincingly argued in favour of the first reading: only one codex has *domini cati*, several others have either *domini ignari* or the haplographic *domini gnari*. In contrastive juxtaposition, Patrick distinguishes three groups of people in Ireland: those of high (*magni*) and of low social standing (*pusilli*) who are Christians (*qui timetis Deum*), both of whom ought to admire him, before finally mentioning the rhetoricians that ought to lis-

³⁶ Aldhelm, ep. 5 (MGH Auct. ant. 15:491–2).

³⁷ Aldhelm, ep. 5 (MGH Auct. ant. 15:489): *luridum qui linguis celydrium trisulcis rancida virulentaque vomentem per aevum venena torrentia tetrae tortionis in tartara trusit et, ubi pridem eiusdem nefandae natricis ermula cervulusque cruda fanis colebantur stoliditate in profanis, versa vice discipulorum gurgustia, immo almae oraminum aedes architecti ingenio fabre conduntur.*

³⁸ Aldhelm, ep. 5 (MGH Auct. ant. 15:490): *fisicae artis machinas.*

³⁹ Aldhelm, ep. 5 (MGH Auct. ant. 15:491): *meditatione letotenus servanda condentes abdunt.*

⁴⁰ Patric. conf. 13: *Unde autem ammiramini itaque, magni et pusilli qui timetis Deum, et vos, domini ignari rethorici, audite et scrutamini.*

ten to him (who are different in that they are not Christians).⁴¹ Bradley then proposed three alternative interpretations on the meaning of the term *domini ignari rethorici*: learned pagans (based on the note in the Leyden Glossary mentioned above), Pelagian heretics and Christians who believe in God but not in the true way.⁴² Bradley qualified the pagan-theory because Patrick does not mention learned pagans elsewhere in his *Confession*. However, he does mention pagans, without specifying, though, whether or not they are highly educated. Elsewhere in his *Confession* and in his letters, Patrick uses expressions similar to the above, such as *gens externa Deum ignorans* (*ep.* 14.4–5: “foreign people not knowing God”), with regard to Irish pagans.⁴³ Bradley dismissed these parallels because Patrick uses *Dominus* instead of *Deus* more often in biblical than in non-biblical contexts,⁴⁴ but this is not a strong argument against the pagan-theory, especially since *gentilis* is the Latin word for “pagan” and it is clear that Patrick refers to contemporary rather than biblical pagans. It can therefore be argued that Patrick was saying that he was more capable of converting these people than his better educated fellow Christians, as he reiterates in the following sentence. Patrick may indeed have fought against educated pagans rather than druids, and there seem to be some repercussions of this conflict represented in seventh-century texts from the British Isles and beyond.

The letters and *Life of Boniface*, the Anglo-Saxon missionary to the Franks, too, attest that certain heretics from Britain were associated with ancient philosophy. It is also possible that their teachings were received among the remaining continental pagans until the eighth century. Willibald, the eighth-century author of his *Life*, credits Boniface (c. 675–755) with having recalled the Thuringians from “the perversity of their teachers.”⁴⁵ Similarly, Pope Gregory III addressed a letter to the pagan Saxons, admonishing them to follow Boniface and to give up paganism as demon worship (referring to Col. 2:8): “beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit.” We have seen that Augustine refers this biblical line to materialist philosophies. Gregory called their teachers “sons of darkness” as opposed to the Christian “children of light.”⁴⁶ Boniface, a native from the kingdom of Wessex (near Wales), referred to learned pa-

⁴¹ Bradley (1983), 536–41.

⁴² Bradley (1983), 541–54, esp. 545–6.

⁴³ See Bradley (1983), 544.

⁴⁴ Bradley (1983), 549–50.

⁴⁵ Willibald, *vita Bonif.* 5 (MGH SS rer. Germ. 57:23).

⁴⁶ Bonif. *ep.* 21. (MGH Epp. Sel. 1:35): ‘videte, ne quis vos amplius decipiat per philosophiam et inanem fallatiam’. astutiores enim sunt filii tenebrarum quam filii lucis. Discedite, filii, ab idolorum cultura et accedite et adorete dominum Deum nostrum.

gans from Britain alongside “false and heretical priests.”⁴⁷ In Francia of the early eighth century, Boniface warned his correspondent young Nithard to pursue liberal studies only through the Bible, avoiding other scholarship, denouncing it as “spiders’ fragile webs.”⁴⁸ We have seen that other Christian authors used the metaphor of spider-webs to denigrate ancient philosophical traditions. Boniface also had “the pagan rite expelled and the erroneous custom destroyed” in Frisia,⁴⁹ but no teachers are mentioned. However, it is unlikely that these teachers had any first-hand knowledge of ancient philosophy; rather, the term of ancient philosophy is used as a label against pagans or heretics, who may, however, have had some knowledge of these old philosophical traditions, similarly to the pagan groups represented in the *Hisperica famina*.

Books continued to be burnt occasionally in some of the other kingdoms that succeeded the Roman Empire in the West. In Visigothic Spain, Arian and Catholic versions of Christianity were in conflict. Reccared, king of the Visigoths (586–601) converted to Catholicism but faced a number of Arian conspiracies. Following the third Council of Toledo in 589, he ordered all Arian books to be forwarded and burnt in order to convert the Arian Visigoths to the Catholic faith.⁵⁰ He appears to have been successful in this aim as there are no surviving Gothic texts from Spain.

Boniface suffered martyrdom in 754 in Frisia and the Frisians plundered his books.⁵¹ According to Willibald’s Life, pagans carrying weaponry spoiled Boniface’s camp of the book chests and relics it contained, later scattering the books widely among the fields and throwing some into the marshes. Christians, however, found the books and rescued them, Willibald suggests.⁵² Kurth has argued that a famous codex in Fulda, linked to Boniface’s death, shows signs of a nail having been hammered into it,⁵³ an allusion to a pagan purification ritual similar to crucifixion. Willibald’s suggestion that greed motivated the pagans corresponds to established literary topoi on outsider groups. Rather, the thorough scattering and destruction of books may have served the purpose of retaliating similar Christian rituals of purification. We have seen that people sometimes de-

⁴⁷ Bonif. ep. 44. (MGH Epp. Sel. 1:71): *gentilitatis ritum et doctrinam vel venientium Brittonum vel falsorum sacerdotum hereticorum*.

⁴⁸ Bonif. ep. 9. (MGH Epp. Sel. 1:4–6, at 4): *fragilia araneorum*.

⁴⁹ Willibald, *vita Bonif.* 7 (MGH SS rer. Germ. 57:47): *Per omnem igitur Fresiam pergens, verbum Domini, paganico repulso ritu et erraneo gentilitatis more destructo, instanter praedicabat ecclesiasque, numine confracto dilubrorum, ingenti studio fabricavit*.

⁵⁰ Fredegar, *chron.* 4.8 (MGH SS rer. Merov. 2:125).

⁵¹ Speyer (1981), 21.

⁵² Willibald, *vita Bonif.* 8 (MGH SS rer. Germ. 57:50–51).

⁵³ Kurth (2010).

stroyed books not so much in order to erase its contents from memory but in order to vanquish the demons associated with these books and therefore applied thorough methods of destruction.

As we have seen, there are examples in the East of confiscated books being brought to monasteries. It is therefore intriguing that the Carolingian Renaissance started in the late eighth century and that it was at this time that a significant amount of classical titles were copied in monasteries. There is no evidence that these titles were stored in monasteries before that time and they may first have been brought to monasteries at that time. The only surviving manuscript of Livy's fifth decade, for example, was at this time first owned by the bishop of Utrecht, which was the missionary centre of Frisia.⁵⁴ This could mean that the book was originally owned by pagans in Frisia before it came to the monastery.

In a lengthy letter minuting a religious trial, Boniface provides evidence of the burning of books. He accused two Christian bishops as "heretics and schismatics" and pleaded for them to be counted among the "pagans" (*ethnici*) because he suffered persecution from their teaching.⁵⁵ This again illustrates the demonical power of books. A pontifical commission in Rome found that a prayer forwarded as proof contained the names of demons instead of angels. Pope Zacharias answered to the commission's unanimous decision: "It has been very well arranged by your holiness that all his writings should be burnt in the fire; but it is advantageous for his rejection and everlasting confusion to preserve them in our holy book shrine."⁵⁶ The judgment was to be read publicly in Francia to deter others.⁵⁷ About a century later, the tradition of Boniface's martyrdom has it that he used the gospel to protect him from the strikes aimed at him,⁵⁸ what perhaps is an allusion to a battle-of-books tradition.

Boniface also reported to Zacharias that the Irish priest Virgilius, active at that time in Bavaria, had put forward the view that life exists on the southern hemisphere of the earth and that the sun and the moon move around a spherical earth. Lucretius had discussed this view.⁵⁹ Augustine primarily rejected it as in-

⁵⁴ CLA 1472.

⁵⁵ Bonif. ep. 59 (MGH Epp. Sel. 1:109–11).

⁵⁶ Bonif. ep. 59 (MGH Epp. Sel. 1:117–18): *'optime provisum est a vestra sanctitate, ut conscripta illius omnia igne cremarentur; sed oportunitum est, ut ad reprobationem eius in sancto nostro scrinio reserventur ad perpetuam eius confusionem.* Cf. Bonif. ep. 62 (MGH Epp. Sel. 1:127–8).

⁵⁷ Bonif. ep. 60 (MGH Epp. Sel. 1:123–4). See Russell (1964).

⁵⁸ Radbod. Traiect. (?) Bonif. 16 (MGH SS rer. Germ. 57:73).

⁵⁹ Lucr. 1.1052–82 argues against the view that individuals on the other side of the earth walk upside-down as there is no centre in an infinite universe.

consistent with biblical creation and with the view that all human beings were descendants of Adam and Eve, although he did not rule out the possibility of a spherical earth.⁶⁰ Zacharias approved Boniface's request.⁶¹

Concerning the perverse and unjust doctrine, which he [Virgilius] professed against God and his own soul, if it shall be clarified that he confesses in this way that there are another world and other human beings underneath the earth or even the sun and the moon, do deprive him of his priestly dignity and expel him from the Church, once a council has been held.

It is not known, however, what happened after this. Because Virgilius eventually became bishop of Salzburg, he likely escaped the charges against him, perhaps because he repented.

In a pastoral letter of 866, Pope Nicholas I in Rome advocated the same policy to the Bulgarians, who were just Christianised. Like the Christian authors of Late Antiquity, he too referred to First Corinthians (15:33) regarding the "profane books" which they had taken from the "Saracens" (the Muslims): "These are by no means to be preserved; for it is written: 'evil communications corrupt good manners.' They must be thrown into the fire as dangerous and blasphemous books."⁶² Nicholas does not specify what books these were; because the Muslims preserved texts from the Roman Empire (such as Aristotle), it is possible that these books were burnt.

Moreover, there is evidence that Christian monks destroyed ancient books, found by coincidence, from St Albans (near London) of the ninth or tenth century. The *History of the abbey of St Albans* dates from as late as the fourteenth century, but it is based on earlier compilations. Constructions on a new church uncovered the remains of the ancient town of Verulamium, including books from its extant period. The workmen, supervised by the abbot, discovered a hoard of books: "books found everywhere", which were of old age.⁶³ Among these was a

⁶⁰ Aug. civ. 16.9.

⁶¹ Bonif. ep. 80 (MGH Epp. Sel. 1:178–9): *de perversa autem et iniqua doctrina, quae contra Deum et animam suam locutus est, si clarificatum fuerit ita eum confiteri, quod alius mundus et alii homines sub terra sint seu sol et luna, hunc habito concilio ab ecclesia pelle sacerdotii honore privatum.*

⁶² Nikolaus I., *Responsa ad consulta Bulgarorum* c. 103 (MGH Epp. 6:599): *de libris profanis, quos a Sarracenis vos abstulisse ac apud vos habere perhibetis, quid faciendum sit, inquiritis. qui nimirum non sunt reservandi: corrumpunt enim, sicut scriptum est, mores bonos colloquia mala, sed utpote noxii et blasphemi igni tradendi;* Werner (2007), 26, 30.

⁶³ *Gesta abbatum monasterii S. Albani*, p. 26: *cum quibusdam minoribus libris et rotulis, cujusdam codicis ignotum volumen, quod parum fuit ex tam longaeva mora demolitum. Cujus nec littera nec idioma alicui tunc invento cognitum, prae antiquitate fuerat. ... similiterque in aliis codicibus,*

luxury codex with golden titles. A search was undertaken to find an old priest able to read the old writings. He found that the luxury codex contained the Life of the local martyr Alban. In the other books he found “invocations and rites of idolatry”, specifically invocations to Phoenix.⁶⁴ Some of these books were written in Old English, others in Latin. Invocations to Phoenix, the mythical creature, are frequently found in ancient poetry, particularly in Late Antiquity.⁶⁵ All books were burnt except for the Live of Alban.⁶⁶ The abbot had this book translated into Latin. Although this book was in good condition when it was discovered,⁶⁷ the author claimed it crumbled into dust when it became known to others.⁶⁸ This statement is suspicious; it is rather more probable that the clerics did not want an alternative version to be distributed. Significantly, the text does not question why the books needed to be burnt but their status as pagan artefacts is a likely reason given that other pagan remainders, such as vessels with artwork were also destroyed.⁶⁹ This is supported by the fact that a generation earlier, abbot Ealdredus had ancient writings found in the soil of the ancient city examined and destroyed.⁷⁰ It seems to have been the general practise at least of this abbey at this time, when books were found to keep what was useful for the propagation of faith and to destroy the others.

The magical character of books is evidenced well into the ninth century. According to a hagiographical text on Ansgar, the Apostle of the North, pirates burnt down a church in Hamburg together with the books it contained. The text indicates that the pirates burnt these and other books deliberately as part of their effort to devastate the whole city. The report continues with the surprising anecdote that a plundered Christian book magically caused an influential

in eodem armariolo, et in eodem habitaculo, repertis; p. 27: libris passim inventis; cf. Speyer (1981), 137.

⁶⁴ *Gesta abbatum monasterii S. Albani*, p. 27: *in aliis vero libris, passim inventis, reperit lector praedictus invocationes et ritus idolatrarum civium Warlamcestrensium; in quibus comperit quod specialiter Phoebum, deum solis, invocaverunt et coluerunt.*

⁶⁵ See van den Broek (1972).

⁶⁶ *Gesta abbatum monasterii S. Albani*, p. 27: *abjectis igitur et combustis libris, in quibus commenta diaboli continebantur, solus ille liber in quo Historia Sancti Albani continebatur, in thesauro carissime reponebatur.*

⁶⁷ *Gesta abbatum monasterii S. Albani*, p. 26: *parum fuit ex tam longaeva mora demolitum.*

⁶⁸ *Gesta abbatum monasterii S. Albani*, p. 27: *cum autem conscripta historia in Latino pluribus, ut iam dictum est, innotuisset, exemplar primitivum ac originale, – quod mirum est dictu, – irrestaurabiliter in pulverem subito redactum, cecidit annullatum.*

⁶⁹ *Gesta abbatum monasterii S. Albani*, p. 28.

⁷⁰ *Gesta abbatum monasterii S. Albani*, p. 24: *Ealdredus, abbas. iste antiquas scripturas subteraneas veteris civitatis, quae ‘Verlamcestre’ dicebatur, perscrutatus, evertit omnia, et implevit.*

pagan from Sweden to lose most of his family and household possessions. A pagan with religious authority (*quendam divinum*) recommended that he get rid of the book. It was nailed to a fence along with a note that whoever wanted could take it.⁷¹ This shows the magical symbolism that was attached to books at this time, but the context and the trajectory of the story indicates that it is possible that the tale could have been made up by the Christian who found the book. In the next section, I shall argue that any non-Christian texts became increasingly suspicious amongst monks and clerics as ecclesiastical laws narrowed the educational requirement for bishops down to biblical studies.

7.2 Ecclesiastical Law

I have already shown that some canons of ecclesiastical law attempted to bar the clergy from reading pagan or heretical books, although I have also noted that some bishops and other office-holders among the clergy had demonstrable exposure to classical texts, often as a consequence of an education that grounded them in these works. The question thus remains: which books were clerics or laypersons supposed to avoid in ecclesiastical law in the early Middle Ages?

Gemeinhardt argued that in the West canon law barred only the clergy from reading pagan books, noting that bishops continued to be educated in literature and display knowledge of pagan literature when writing and proselytizing about its exclusion as this practice became firmly established in the late sixth century.⁷² However, the passages discussed by Gemeinhardt provide no firm evidence that there was a requirement for bishops to receive an education in the classics, although Gemeinhardt is probably correct to assume that some read them in private. There is evidence to suggest that canon law required clerical education to be received in Bible studies, but this does not mean that clerics never read the classics.⁷³ Gregory of Tours in the late sixth century, for example, endorsed the work of Martianus Capella that contains mythological material.⁷⁴ It does not axiomatically follow that all classical literature was privately read, however.

71 Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii* 16 (*biblioteca ... una cum pluribus aliis libris igni perdit*), 18 (MGH SS rer. Germ. 55:37–9).

72 Gemeinhardt (2007), 307–9 and 494: *Bildung in antikem Sinne der artes liberales wird damit zur Privatsache*.

73 *Brev. Hippon. Can.* 1 (CCSL 149:33): *ut primum scripturis divinis instructi vel ab infantia eruditi, propter fidei professionem et assertionem, clerici promoveantur*.

74 Greg. Tur. *Franc.* 10.31.18 (MGH SS rer. Merov. 1.1:536): he calls him *Martianus noster*; Gemeinhardt (2007), 309–10.

Martianus Capella employed a Neoplatonic allegorized technique that was both palatable to and also appropriated by the Christian readership. Jerome (d. 420), on the other hand, complained about clerics being educated in classical writings, at the turn of the fifth century.⁷⁵ This is a clear statement that classical texts were still studied at that time, but the statement by Gregory of Tours is different.

In this context, the *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua* (c. fifth century) states that a bishop needed to be “literate” (*litteratus*).⁷⁶ Scholarship has interpreted this differently. Gemeinhardt is probably correct to assert that this term in context refers to literacy and Bible knowledge rather than to education in the classics because the *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua* barred bishops from reading pagan and heretical books unless the knowledge of the latter was going to be useful to refute adversaries.⁷⁷ Its collation of canon law was widely known from the fifth century onwards, suggesting that it was established orthodoxy by this point. By contrast, a canon of the Fourth Council of Toledo in 633 required literacy for episcopal candidates, indicating that illiteracy among bishops had become a concern in the Visigothic kingdom.⁷⁸

Pope Gregory the Great also wished Christians, including laypersons, to abstain from studies related to the classical tradition: “Bishops must explain the holy scripture instead of grammar.”⁷⁹ The passage is included in the twelfth century *Decretum Gratianum*, taken from a letter Gregory wrote to bishop Desiderius of Vienna in 601. In this letter Gregory reports of complaints about, and strongly disapproves of, Desiderius teaching grammar: “The praise of Christ does not fit in one mouth along with the praise of Jupiter. How serious and unholy it is for a bishop to teach what is not even fitting for a religious layperson.”⁸⁰ Gregory, however, rather than thinking of classical texts in general, was concerned about teaching of grammar as such. When he elsewhere condemned “these foolish and secular writings”, he probably did not mean the classics,⁸¹ as he wrote in another letter, “because I consider it utterly unworthy to restrict the words of the

⁷⁵ Hier. ep. 21.13; in Eph. 3.6.4 (PL 26:574A).

⁷⁶ Stat. eccl. ant. pr. (CCSL 148:164).

⁷⁷ Gemeinhardt (2007), 318; see p. 223, note 105 above.

⁷⁸ Conc. Tolet. 4 can. 19 (Mansi 10:625) and see Gemeinhardt (2007), 317 note 43 for examples of illiterate bishops.

⁷⁹ Decret. Gratiani 1.86.5: *sacram scripturam, non grammaticam debet episcopus exponere* (*Corpus Iuris Canonici* I, 299 Friedberg).

⁸⁰ Decret. Gratiani 1.86.5: *in uno se ore cum Iovis laudibus Christi laudes non capiunt. et quam grave nefandumque sit episcopis canere, quod nec laico religioso conveniat.*

⁸¹ Greg. M. in 1 reg. 11.34 (MGH Epp. 2:303) *nugis et saecularibus litteris.*

heavenly oracle under the rules of Donatus.”⁸² Far from being a controversial writer, Aelius Donatus was the author of a grammatical handbook most commonly used in the Middle Ages and a scholar who had personally tutored Jerome.

The sixth-century *Decretum Gelasianum* offers a list of Christian canonical books. It also gives a list of heretical and apocryphal texts and authors which are to be condemned forever: “a few which have been handed down” (5.1). This indicates that other texts were not seen as dangerous any longer and not included as they were obviously deviating from canonical texts. It was widely received in the West during the Middle Ages and several parts of this *Decretum* can be traced back to the fourth-century pope Damasus.

Similarly, a late sixth-century rule from an unknown monastery in southern Gaul barred secular fables (*fabulae saeculares*) unless they contributed to the audience’s edification. Gemeinhardt interprets this line as allowing the study of “texts of pagan education” in this monastery, but it must be noted that it is doubtful that the term “secular” means pagan texts because the canon only mentions “secular fables” in conversation.⁸³

In 789, Charlemagne addressed the *General Warning* (*Admonitio generalis*) to the clergy and people of the Frankish empire, ruling that “only the canonical books, the Catholic treatises and the words of the saints are to be read and preserved” in order to keep the populace away from any error. “Everything against the Catholic faith” was not to be read but burnt.⁸⁴ Monasteries and episcopal sees were advised to ascertain that schools contained corrected books (*emendatos libros*). Charlemagne’s address demonstrates the care which was taken to ensure that the material used in schools, many of which were just founded, was correct. They were supplied with a list of literary genres which besides various liturgical books included grammar books, but not full classical texts (cap. 72). It is probable that the classics had ceased to be studied in the West long before this edict was issued. Nevertheless, Charlemagne’s educational reforms were re-

⁸² Greg. M. 1 reg. 5.53a (MGH Epp. 1:357): *quia indignum vehementer existimo, ut verba caelestis oraculi restringam sub regulis Donati*; not included in Norberg’s edition.

⁸³ *Regula Tarnat*. 9 (PL 66:981B): *nec colloquutione quarumcunque fabularum saecularium occupentur, nisi fortasse hoc proferat sermo relatoris, quod animam aedificet audientis*. Gemeinhardt (2007), 315.

⁸⁴ *Admonitio generalis* cap. 78: *omnibus. item et pseudographia et dubiae narrationes, vel quae omnino contra fidem catholicam sunt et epistola pessima et falsissima, quam transacto anno dicebant aliqui errantes et in errorem alios mittentes quod de celo cecidisset, nec credantur nec legantur sed conburentur, ne in errorem per talia scripta populus mittatur. sed soli canonici libri et catholici tractatus et sanctorum auctorum dicta legantur et tradantur*. On the “letter from heaven”, Brown (2003), 422–3; 450.

sponsible for the revival of learning in the early ninth century. While education was thus based on Christian authors, few manuscripts containing classical texts are still extant today from this time period.

In sum, while there is evidence that ecclesiastical law required office holders to be educated and acquainted with *litterae*, this probably did not mean that they were required to read the classics. However, bishops and other clerics may have continued to study these texts privately until around the sixth century even during their tenure. But if education in the classics became unnecessary for career paths (as we have seen in Chapter 5), then this probably correlates to a reduced interest in preserving these works in this period, as I shall demonstrate in the final section. In the next section, we will see that Isidore of Seville gives an illuminating insight into contemporary attitudes towards classical authors, ancient philosophy and books in monasteries.

7.3 Isidore of Seville

Isidore, bishop of Seville, (d. 636) widely acclaimed as an important Christian scholar in Western Europe of the seventh century, wrote the *Etymologies* in the last years of his life in Visigothic Spain. As Merrills put it, it is “perhaps the single most influential book of the Latin Middle Ages”,⁸⁵ not least because of its status as an authoritative text for the use of ancient literature. In this regard, the *Etymologies* serve as an intermediary between Antiquity and the Middle Ages. As has been asserted by Diesner, Isidore was a central figure in as much as he attempted to safeguard ancient culture for the first time during the invasions, while also contributing to the dearth of education in his age.⁸⁶ This is because Isidore aimed at limiting access to pagan books to the small elite that needed to be able to refute them.⁸⁷ Although Isidore himself quoted classical lines in his *Etymologies*, I agree with those studies which have argued that Isidore’s quotations were based on extracts found in Christian authors rather than on the original books.⁸⁸

Hitherto, Isidore’s works have not been read against the terminology of late antique legislation with regard to censorship and destruction of books. At the

⁸⁵ Merrills (2005).

⁸⁶ Diesner (1973), 77.

⁸⁷ Diesner (1977), 104.

⁸⁸ On sources Isidore used in the *Etymologies* (8.11), MacFarlane (1980), 7–9. These are all Christian authors, except for Servius and perhaps abridgements of Varro. Isidore quotes classical lines from Christian authors. Cf. Fontaine (1959), 738–62, at 759: *pseudo-citations*.

time of Isidore, the Breviary of Alaric was in force as a legal code in the Visigothic kingdom. It included the *Codex Theodosianus* (the relevant laws of Christian emperors), later novels and certain juristic works.⁸⁹ Thus the prevailing climate informed Isidore's composition of guidelines for ecclesiastic and monastic affairs. As we have seen, imperial and ecclesiastic legislation had banned magical, divinatory and heretical books as well as those of the *mathematici*. His work is interesting not so much as a historical source for previous centuries, but rather as highlighting what he thought about this past. It shows the difficult relationships that people at that time had in regard to books, their efforts to rewrite a history that was hardly accessible to them and the magical powers they continued to attribute to the books of their past.

The *Etymologies* include a chronographic table which helps reveal how the history of Antiquity was perceived in this transitional period. For example, the table catalogues the burning of Christian books among the memorable deeds of Diocletian, indicating that this event was still commemorated after centuries had passed.⁹⁰ While Christian writings are central to its table of world ages, pagan ones are not even mentioned. Although he himself occasionally quotes the classics, in Isidore's writing it is clear that the culturally relevant canon of literature was a purely Christian one.⁹¹ Isidore names the martyr Pamphilus as the first noteworthy Christian to have founded a library, with the same zeal as Peisistratus (Peisistratus had canonised the Homeric texts in archaic Greece, while Pamphilus, who died in 309/10, was a friend and contemporary of Eusebius and among the founders of the theological library of Caesarea).⁹² Isidore bridges the gap that existed between the large Greek and Roman libraries (he wrongly gives the figure of 70,000 books for the Hellenistic library of Alexandria⁹³) to the Christian canon citing Jerome's authority: he had ransacked the whole world for Church writers and "integrated the results of their studies in a single-volume mini-index".⁹⁴ He also notes that while the pagans had used a variety of techniques to produce books, the Christian book is the codex.⁹⁵

Book eight of the *Etymologies* deals with the Church and any kind of deviance in the following order: heresies, pagan philosophers, poets, sibyls, magicians, pagans and their gods. To Isidore, the "catholic" Church is global whereas

⁸⁹ See King (1972), 10–11.

⁹⁰ Isid. *orig.* 5.39.35: *iste divinis libris adustis martyria fecit*.

⁹¹ Isid. *orig.* 6.1–2, 8, 15–16; Isid. *eccl. off.* 1.12.

⁹² Isid. *orig.* 6.6.1.

⁹³ Isid. *orig.* 6.3.5.

⁹⁴ Isid. *orig.* 6.6.2: *eorumque studia in uno voluminis indiculo comprehenderunt*.

⁹⁵ Isid. *orig.* 6.12–13.

the heretics are confined to regional areas.⁹⁶ Isidore defines these heretics firstly “as the Peripatetic, Academic, Epicurean, and Stoic philosophers, as well as others who, inventing a perverse doctrine, have retreated from the Church by their own will.”⁹⁷ Deviance from apostolic teaching, even in case of some angel evangelising differently, “will be called accursed, *anathema*.”⁹⁸ Isidore also lists superstition, which is often used as a derogatory term for paganism, as a sub-category of heresy.⁹⁹ After completing the catalogues of heretical groups with a Judaeo-Christian background, he lists philosophical groups, noting the Pythagoreans and Cynics in addition to those just mentioned.¹⁰⁰ Epicurean atomism is the last on Isidore’s list. Natural philosophers in general are also called *theologi*, as their teaching, too, implied speculation on the nature of God.¹⁰¹ This shows that he perceived questions on the nature of the world intrinsically linked to Christian faith. Isidore also considered Christian heresies and ancient philosophies as two sides of the same coin. In this context, various philosophical tenets had influenced prominent heretics – Isidore explicitly names Arius, Valentinus and Marcion¹⁰² – and it is interesting that the book searches in the age of Constantine, as reported by Eusebius, included the writings of these three non-conformist authors and those of their respective schools as the target groups.¹⁰³ This does not mean that Isidore considered these old philosophies a living tradition, but rather he repeated the warnings of the ancient Christian authors that he studied.

Similarly, in his *Synonyma*, which deal with sin and conversion, Isidore warns of “curiosity” (*curiositas*), that is the teaching of anything not included in the Bible. Isidore links *curiositas* to heresy and fables.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁶ Isid. *orig.* 8.1.1 Lindsay (= PG 82:73–728, book 8: 293–326). On book 8, see Henderson (2007), 114–20.

⁹⁷ Isid. *orig.* 8.3.1: *ut philosophi Peripatetici, Academici, et Epicurei et Stoici, vel sicut alii qui perversum dogma cogitantes arbitrio suo de Ecclesia recesserunt*. Isidore here borrowed from Jerome, in Tit. 3.10–11 (PL 26:633): *philosophi quoque Stoici, Peripatetici, Academici, Epicurei, illius vel illius haereseos appellantur*; cf. Tert. *praescr.* 6–7. Fontaine (1959), 596, note 2.

⁹⁸ Isid. *orig.* 8.3.3.

⁹⁹ Isid. *orig.* 8.3.6.

¹⁰⁰ Isid. *orig.* 8.6.2, 7–16.

¹⁰¹ Isid. *orig.* 8.6.18; cf. 8.6.3–4; 13.2. On atomism in the Etymologies, Henderson (2007), 156–8.

¹⁰² Isid. *orig.* 8.6.22–3: *hi philosophorum errores etiam apud Ecclesiam induxerunt haereses ... Eadem materia apud haereticos et philosophos volutatur, idem retractatus inplicantur*. On Valentinus, Hipp. *haer.* 6.29.

¹⁰³ Eus. *v.C.* 3.64 with 66. See section 1.3 above.

¹⁰⁴ Isid. *synon.* 2.71: *nulla autem tibi sit curiositas sciendi latentia. cave indagare quae sunt a sensibus humanis remota. praetermitte quasi secretum quod Scripturae auctoritate non didicisti*.

You shall not be curious to know what is hidden. Beware of investigating what is removed from the human senses. Ignore what you have not learned from the authority of Scripture as if it were a secret. You shall not search further than what is written, you shall not inquire more broadly than that what the divine scripture declares. You shall not wish to know what you are not allowed to know. Curiosity is dangerous presumption, curiosity is harmful knowledge. It is a call to heresy, it precipitates the mind into sacrilegious fables.

Accordingly, Isidore's *Etymologies* counts pagan poets among religious deviators, quoting Suetonius in order to link poetry to the origin of pagan religion and to temple culture as two ways of worshipping.¹⁰⁵ Also, in the section "on the gods of the pagans" he suggests that the poets had praised gods and contributed to their worship.¹⁰⁶ Underpinning this is the belief that worshipping any gods except for the Christian God is idolatry (*idololatria*).¹⁰⁷ Isidore's judgment on tragedy and comedy as well as other dramatic genres was a negative one.¹⁰⁸ Elsewhere, in the *Sententiae*, he gives a guide on the ideal Christian conduct of life. Here he equates reading poetry to sacrifices, which were frequently prohibited under the threat of capital punishment too. Thus while he himself sometimes quotes classical poetry, Isidore endorses the position that generally Christians are forbidden to read pagan poetry at all.¹⁰⁹

He also includes "some poets" in the same category as natural philosophers, that of *theologi*, which we have seen he considered heretical. While poems such as Lucretius' *De rerum natura* seem to be the primary candidates for this verdict, this category applies to those that had written poems on the gods.¹¹⁰ To be sure, Isidore quoted Lucretius only from earlier Christian authors.¹¹¹ Exceptions are those poems that versify history, those which tell "that which really happened."

nihil ultra quam scriptum est quaeras, nihil amplius perquiras quam divinae litterae praedicant. scire non cupias quod scire non licet. curiositas periculosa praesumptio est, curiositas damnosa peritia est. in heresim provocat, in fabulas sacrilegas mentem praecipitat. Cf. 2.3: omnia quae Scriptura prohibet cave, 2.45: cavenda est verborum obscenitas, 2.46: cave a fabulis ineptissimis.

¹⁰⁵ Isid. *orig.* 8.7.1–2; Suet. *de poetis* pr. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Isid. *orig.* 8.11.2: *in coelum eos sustulerunt.*

¹⁰⁷ Isid. *orig.* 8.11.11.

¹⁰⁸ Isid. *orig.* 18.45: *tragoedi ... facinora sceleratorum regum.* 46: *comoedi ... stupra virginum et amores meretricum.*

¹⁰⁹ Isid. *sent.* 3.13.1: *ideo prohibetur Christianus figmenta legere poetarum, quia per oblectamenta inanum fabularum mentem excitant ad incentiva libidinum. Non enim solum thura offerendo daemonibus immolatur, sed etiam eorum dicta libentius capiendo.* Similar on the theatre: Isid. *orig.* 18.51.

¹¹⁰ Isid. *orig.* 8.7.9: *quidam autem poetae theologi dicti sunt, quoniam de diis carmina faciebant.*

¹¹¹ Isid. *orig.* 8.3.7; 8.6.15–16 with Schmid (1962), 790, who gives further literature, such as works by Fontaine.

Isidore's narrative trajectory thus corresponds to the Christian poets of Late Antiquity having concentrated on panegyrics (celebrating the deeds of rulers) and poems of saints. Yet Isidore also excludes the pagan author and fellow Spaniard Lucan explicitly from his verdict.¹¹² He was perhaps inspired by the classical author Quintilian, who wrote that Lucan should be imitated by orators rather than by poets.¹¹³

Isidore's advice seems to have been taken seriously because from the only two manuscripts containing classical Latin texts that survive from the period between 550 to 750, one has Lucan's poem on the civil war alongside a text authored by Isidore.¹¹⁴ It is possible that Lucan's Spanish background and his dissidence from the emperor Nero, whom Christians hated, could have caused Isidore's apology for this pagan author.

Alongside poets, Isidore catalogues "Sibyls" and "magicians." He defines *vates* (just equated with poets) as every prophesying male and "Sybil" as every prophesying female.¹¹⁵ Magicians are compared to the atomistic philosopher Democritus and to the age of Hippocrates' medicine.¹¹⁶ He calls Circe a witch (*maga*) and derives his attribution of magical qualities particularly to women from Vergil.¹¹⁷ As we have seen, it had frequently been ruled by imperial and ecclesiastical legislation that books on magical and divinatory subjects were to be destroyed. Isidore concludes his section on magicians: "All this must therefore be avoided by a Christian, must be utterly rejected and damned with every execration."¹¹⁸

As we have seen, a further law from 409 ordered the books of *mathematici*, too, to be burnt. Discussing the term *mathematici* Isidore catalogues these as "interpreters of the stars", which were known as *magi* first, such as those who had predicted the birth of Christ. Later they were called *mathematici* in the common

112 Isid. orig. 8.7.10: *officium autem poetae in eo est, ut quae vere gestae sunt in alias species obliquis figurationibus cum decore aliquo conversa transducatur. unde et Lucanus ideo in numero poetarum non ponitur, quia videtur historiam composuisse, non poema.* Isidore quotes Lucan in 8.9.2, 10, for example.

113 Quint. inst. 10.90: *Lucanus [...] magis oratoribus quam poetis imitandus.*

114 CLA 33.

115 Isid. orig. 8.8.2: *sicut enim omnis vir prophetans, vel vates dicitur, vel propheta ita omnis femina prophetans Sibylla vocatur.*

116 Isid. orig. 8.9.2.

117 Isid. orig. 8.9.5, 6.

118 Isid. orig. 8.9.31: *unde cuncta vitanda sunt a Christiano, et omni penitus execratione repudianda atque damnanda.* In 32, he explicitly refers to books on the Etruscan religion: *quos libros Romani ex Etrusca lingua in propriam mutaverunt.*

population.¹¹⁹ As we have seen, this corresponds to the ambiguous meaning of this term in Ammianus Marcellinus and others. Both authors agree that the uneducated considered these *mathematici* to be astrologers. According to book three of the *Etymologies*, the writings on astrology (*mathesis*) are “without doubt, contrary to our faith and should be so ignored by Christians as not to seem to have been written down.”¹²⁰ He thus wished to make books like these to appear as if they had never existed at all. For the more educated, on the other hand, Isidore, following Plato, lists arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy among the *disciplinae mathematicae* at the beginning of this book.¹²¹

Isidore occasionally suggested banning dangerous books, and as we have just seen the category of heresy applied to many ancient philosophers. In his *Sententiae*, Isidore thus pleads for carefully considering if any reading contains the words of heretics “under the name of catholic scholars.”¹²² In the following section, “on the books of the pagans” (*de libris gentilium*), he first prohibits Christians from reading “the fictions of the poets”, as we have seen. He then lists the “mundane doctrines”, “vain fictions” and “the mysteries of the sky”, noting that “such books need to be avoided.”¹²³ Again, he encompasses a broad range of texts under his verdict in the following:¹²⁴

Every secular doctrine echoes the waves of words and, raising itself through the tumour of eloquence, has been annihilated by the simple and humble Christian doctrine, as it is written: ‘has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?’ [1Cor. 1:20]

119 Isid. orig. 9.9.24–5: *hi sunt qui vulgo Mathematici vocantur*. 3.71.17 links astrology to Stoic philosophy. See Henderson (2007), 62.

120 Isid. orig. 3.71.38: *horum igitur signorum observationes, vel geneses, vel cetera superstitionis, quae se ad cognitionem siderum coniungunt, id est ad notitiam fatorum, et fidei nostrae sine dubitatione contraria sunt, sic ignorari debent a Christianis, ut nec scripta esse videantur*. The following paragraph refers to this subject as *mathesis*, not *mathematica*.

121 Isid. orig. 3.1.1–2; 2.24.4, 10, 14–15.

122 Isid. sent. 3.12.7: *sub nomine catholicorum doctorum* with 8: *caute meditanda cautoque sensu probanda sunt quae leguntur, ut, iuxta apostolica monita* [1Thess. 5:21], *et teneamus quae recta sunt, et refutemus quae contraria veritati existunt* (8). 3.12.5: *doctores errorum*. Cf. 3.40–41: The raging and the superb scholars.

123 Isid. sent. 3.13.2: *sed quid prodest in mundanis doctrinis proficere, et inanescere in divinis; caduca sequi figmenta, et coelestia fastidire mysteria? cavendi sunt igitur tales libri, et propter amorem sanctarum Scripturarum vitandi*. Cf. 1.17.1–2, which links to the devil the *philosophi gentium* and their opinions in *dimensione temporum, cursuque siderum, ac discussione elementorum*.

124 Isid. sent. 3.13.6: *omnis saecularis doctrina spumantibus verbis resonans, ac se per eloquentiae tumorem adtollens, per doctrinam simplicem et humilem Christianam evacuata est, sicut scriptum est: nonne stultam fecit Deus sapientiam huius mundi?*

Isidore further explicates the texts to be avoided as containing “pagan eloquence” and “mundane knowledge.”¹²⁵ Exceptions, however, apply to the art of grammar (*grammaticae ars*). While on the one hand grammatical texts are not to be preferred to “simpler” (Christian) texts, on the other:¹²⁶

Grammarians are better than heretics. For the heretics instil the potion of lethal juice into men by persuasion; the doctrine of the grammarians, however, can even contribute to life as long as it is used for a better purpose.

This verdict, too, corresponds to the fact that a relatively large number of grammatical texts have been copied between 550 and 750. Fontaine thought that Isidore’s justification of grammar included pagan literature as studied in schools because the art of grammar included the introduction to literary genres.¹²⁷ On the other hand, we have seen that Augustine suggested that reading and hearing eloquent Christians could and should largely replace the traditional study of rhetoric.¹²⁸ Much of the knowledge of the classics at that time was based on handbooks containing short quotations (*florilegia*) rather than on the original writings.

Within the context of monastic text transmission, Isidore’s *Regula monachorum* provide insight into how texts were treated in monastic life. In monasteries, the “sanctuary watchdog” (*custos sacrarii*) was in charge of keeping books (*codices*). Monks had to ask for loans, which needed to be returned on the same day.¹²⁹ Their reading was limited to conformist Christian books:¹³⁰

The monk shall beware of reading the books of the pagans and the writings of the heretics. For it is better not to know their pernicious dogmas than to fall into some snare of error through the experience.

125 Isid. *sent.* 3.13.7: *gentilis eloquentia*, 9: *mundana scientia*.

126 Isid. *sent.* 3.13.11: *meliores esse grammaticos quam hereticos; heretici enim haustum letiferi sucus hominibus persuadendo propinant; grammaticorum autem doctrina potest etiam proficere ad vitam, dum fuerit in meliores usus adsumpta*.

127 Fontaine (1959), 785–8, at 788.

128 Aug. *doctr. christ.* 4.3.4; 4.5.8.

129 Isid. *reg. monach.* 8.1; Isid. *orig.* 1.3.1 mentions *librarii et calculatores*.

130 Isid. *reg. monach.* 8.3: *gentilium autem libros vel haereticorum volumina monachus legere caveat. melius enim est eorum perniciose dogmata ignorare quam per experientiam in aliquo laqueo erroris incurrere*.

Because monks were in charge of copying their monasteries' books, this suggests that pagan texts were less likely to be copied. They were seen as having a contagious and ensnaring demonical influence. Contemporary legislation also included similar censorship laws. The far reaching *Visigothic Code* of 642/3 ruled that Jews should not have (unspecified) anti-Christian books:¹³¹

If any Jew reads these books, or studies doctrines, which contain any evil thought against the Christian faith, or keeps or conceals such books in his house, he shall have his head shaved and receive a hundred lashes in public.

The law also states that second time book offenders were threatened with exile and property confiscation. Parents and teachers who instruct children in the doctrines contained in such books were to receive the same punishments, punishments that included the children if they were above 10 years of age. It is worth noting that more than two centuries earlier Augustine had characterised the “enemies of the Church”, that is philosophers arguing contrary to the Bible and non-conformist Christians, roughly in the same words as the law (*male sentiendo*), suggesting the increasing confluence of secular law and Christian polemical discourse.¹³²

In conclusion, Isidore, who probably had at least knowledge of the *Codex Theodosianus*,¹³³ appears to deliberately adopt this legal terminology in his polemical passages against pagan literature, such as against certain poetical authors and philosophical schools, in order to make his point. This fleshes out the sterile wording of the *Codex Theodosianus* and other laws within what is essentially a handbook of knowledge. In doing so, Isidore often borrowed from Christian authors of the fourth and earlier centuries indicating, perhaps, that book-burning laws could be interpreted similarly by clerics in previous centuries. Yet the books which Isidore condemns the most can hardly be thought of as still circulating in the early seventh century. Nevertheless, the circulation and importance of Isidore's works must have had an impact on reading interests in his age and in the centuries to come. It is therefore important that he considered materialist philosophies dangerous ideas. I shall argue in the next section that there are indeed reasons to think that his attitudes towards the classical heritage are somewhat representative for monastic communities in charge of book produc-

¹³¹ *Leg. Wisig.* 12.3.11 (*MGH LL nat. Germ.* 1:438): *et ideo, si quis Iudeorum libros illos legerit vel doctrinas adtenderit sive habitos in domo sua celaverit, in quibus male contra fidem Christi sentitur, et publice decalvabitur et centenorum flagellorum verberatione plectetur.*

¹³² *Aug. civ.* 18.51, see p. 179 above.

¹³³ Isidore refers to the *Codex Theodosianus* as current law in *orig.* 5.1.7.

tion at that time in western Europe. This is also indicated by the ecclesiastical legislation that I have discussed in the previous section.

7.4 Membra Disiecta

The eye of the needle through which ancient Latin literature had to pass in order to survive was particularly small for the transmission of classical Latin texts from 550 to 750: “The copying of classical texts tapered off to such an extent during the Dark Ages that the continuity of pagan culture came close to being severed.”¹³⁴ This was a world entirely different from the fourth and fifth centuries before the Roman Empire collapsed. Rome and major parts of Italy fell successively to the Ostrogoths, the Byzantines and the Lombards. With the fall of the Western Empire, trading stopped, and papyrus was hardly available. While papyrus continued to be used for documents, it had ceased to be the carrier of literature already before that time. In this section I shall argue that there was very little interest in most pagan texts during this time period and that the attitudes towards pagan texts that I have discussed in the previous chapters influenced the decisions about which pagan texts to preserve.

Based on the extant remainders of manuscripts listed in the *Codices Latini Antiquiores* (including fragments and palimpsests), Pöhlmann identified 26 “profane texts” from this time period, 24 of which are “secular texts”¹³⁵ (here primarily agriculture and architecture). In Pöhlmann’s taxonomy, while “classical” refers to fine arts literature (normally from before the fourth century), “secular” means non-theological texts such as technical texts or Christian history. The only two manuscripts with “classical” texts extant from this time period are Lucan’s *Civil War* and Rufius Festus’ *Breviarium*.¹³⁶ While the former is a poem on Caesar and Pompey, the latter work is a short account of Roman history written in the late fourth century. Rufius Festus is probably identical with the instigator of the magic trials that took place in Antioch and in the East in the 370s. The lost late antique archetype of a ninth-century manuscript of Rufius Festus had a subscription saying that the book might be read with the blessing of Christ. Alan Cameron rightfully notes that the subscription intends to outweigh the pagan character of the work;¹³⁷ however, the *Breviarium* is certainly a non-theological but

¹³⁴ Reynolds and Marshall (1983), xvii.

¹³⁵ Pöhlmann (1994), 100.

¹³⁶ *CLA* 33, 1631.

¹³⁷ Alan Cameron (2011), 432; and in a review by M.D. Reeve, *Gnomon* 69 (1997), 508–13, at 510.

hardly a “classical” work. Similar things can be said about the copy of Lucan’s poem as it was copied alongside a work by Isidore of Seville. Because Isidore endorsed Lucan, as we have seen, this can be interpreted as a justification to copy this pagan text.

Libraries were for centuries dominated by Christian texts. For Greek literature “so many copies of the leading fathers exist that their number is more an embarrassment than a source of pleasure to the modern scholar who has to edit the text.”¹³⁸ A similar picture emerges if one sifts through the catalogue of the oldest Latin manuscripts (*Codices Latini Antiquiores*). So far as we know, in the West (or rather in Italy) books were copied from 550 to 750 only in monastic and church libraries. At least by this time, decisions about which books to receive or not to receive were therefore made by Christian institutions.

It was only in the Carolingian Renaissance of the late-eighth and ninth centuries that monastic libraries of the West first began expanding significantly. Regarding the classics, the archetypes of medieval text transmission (that is the manuscripts that later copies were based on) mostly belong to this time period; a few of which from this time period are extant today. It was only later, particularly in the twelfth century, that the scripts used in Latin manuscripts did change significantly, making them much more difficult to read.¹³⁹ It is likely that these ninth-century books were seemingly based on editions from about the fifth century. Unlike with many Christian books, however, nothing certain is known as to their origin,¹⁴⁰ leading Lapidge to conclude that they were accidental finds.¹⁴¹ We have seen that the only surviving manuscript of Livy’s fifth decade is first attested in Utrecht and may therefore have been confiscated from the pagans in Frisia.

A comparatively large number of palimpsests are attested for this time period. A palimpsest is a book whose original script was deleted and the material reused for a different text. Lowe published a list of palimpsests containing lower writing (the original text) from before the ninth century.¹⁴² The list includes pagan, non-conformist Christian and orthodox texts that were found to be outdated, damaged, difficult to read, or of lesser importance. Yet, so far this list

138 Wilson (1980), 300. For the West, see Lapidge (2006), 127–32 and appendices.

139 Bischoff (1990), 118–27.

140 It is hardly known where *CLA*-manuscripts with classical texts were stored before Renaissance Humanism. The earliest recorded manuscripts are *CLA* 99: Vergil, Codex Palatinus, “probably to be identified with a MS. in the oldest Lorsch catalogue”; 562 Livy: “probably belonged to the library of Corbie. A copy of it was made at Tours saec. VIII–IX”; 1472 Livy: in Utrecht in the late eighth century (see above).

141 Lapidge (2006), 131.

142 Lowe (1972).

has not been read alongside the total of pagan texts attested for this period, and this reading will indicate that there is some reason to suggest that the pagan character of a text increased its chances of being deleted and reused.

It is thus pertinent to note that the *Codices Latini Antiquiores* – cataloguing Latin manuscripts with literary content from before the ninth century – contain 1,884 entries or books, which make up more than 2,000 titles.¹⁴³ Of course, we cannot say how many books were actually produced from the fifth to eighth centuries, but are not traceable anymore; yet, given the small size of known libraries after the fall of the Roman Empire, it is likely that this figure does account for a statistically significant portion of books that were produced during these centuries. Estimations are that first medieval monastic libraries – the heirs of text transmission – consisted of about 20 codex books and grew to some 500 volumes in the cultural peak of the twelfth century.¹⁴⁴ Isidore of Seville describes his seventh-century library, the largest library known from Europe of this time, as consisting of some fourteen to sixteen shelves with a maximum of between 10 or 30 books each.¹⁴⁵ Estimations of how many titles Isidore quoted vary from 154 to a maximum of 475.¹⁴⁶ At any rate, as Lehmann has shown from a comparison of quotations, Isidore based his work on the sixth-century works of Cassiodorus and probably never read many of the titles he quoted.¹⁴⁷ On the other hand, it is possible that pagan texts, copied from the fifth to eighth centuries, are underrepresented within the group of books traceable today, if copies of pagan texts received less care than copies of Christian texts.

Of these 1,884 entries, I have identified 67 entries (less than 4 per cent) as containing classical title(s), transmitted in libraries. A further 44 pieces, mostly papyri, also contain classical titles, but these are archaeological finds from Egypt that were stored in libraries at the time of publication.¹⁴⁸ One such papyrus, *CLA* 833, was burnt but not entirely destroyed by fire, possibly by a Christian acting on religious grounds. Another interesting item among this group is a fifth-century scrap of parchment, containing fragments of the lost 11th book of Livy. It was

143 12 volumes, edited by E.A. Lowe, and later additions: Bischoff and Brown (1985): *CLA* 1812–65, (1992): *CLA* 1866–84.

144 Ward (2000), 171; and see Lapidge (2006), 127, too.

145 Ward (2000), 149; Lapidge (2006), 21 with note 88: reconstruction of the content based on Beeson. There was no section for classical authors. Isidore found his quotations from classical authors in *florilegia et grammatica*.

146 McCrank (1994), 427, Lapidge (2006), 22 with note 90: perhaps as many as 475.

147 Lehmann (1959), 60.

148 *CLA* 134, 175 (reused as binding), 210, 223–4, 226–7 (= sub 1560), 246, 247, 286–91, 367, 833, 1043, 1054, 1201, 1214, 1519, 1522, 1569–70, 1650–51 (palimpsest), 1652–3, 1693, 1708–10, 1712, 1717, 1721, 1813, 1816, 1817, 1832, 1833, 1839, 1866, 1867.

found in 1986, when archaeologists excavated the ruins of the Coptic medieval monastery of Naqlun in the Fayyum. The parchment was found along with ceramic fragments and old papyri (Greek and Coptic, mostly *saec.* VI–VII, fewer *saec.* VIII–IX).¹⁴⁹ It is possible that the texts were thus thrown out by the monks in the ninth century or later.

The bulk of *Codices Latini Antiquiores* are made up predominantly of Christian titles, although there are a few secular ones as well. Among these are legal, medicinal, agricultural and grammatical texts (including commentaries on Vergil and Cicero). From the 67 classical entries mentioned above, 52 were produced before the eighth century, as we have seen mostly from c. 350 to 550. 43 of these 52 early manuscripts (83 per cent) were practically destroyed at one point during the Middle Ages. 38 pieces were deleted and overwritten and five were reused for wrapping or binding purposes.¹⁵⁰ Among the “early palimpsest” group, all but two were deleted between the sixth and eighth centuries, in the monasteries of Bobbio and Luxeuil or in places unknown.¹⁵¹ The only exceptions are a fifth-century Vergil manuscript that was partly used as a palimpsest in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries (*CLA* 977) and the seventh-century Lucan manuscript used as palimpsest in the eleventh century (33), with Christian miscellaneous texts and Augustine’s *De Trinitate* respectively as the upper writing. All the early palimpsests, too, have Christian texts (leading Christian authors, council acts, and biblical books) as the upper script.

Certain classical authors, however, were more likely to escape deletion. Among the “early non-palimpsest” group, five manuscripts have Vergil, two have Livy and the other two have Terence and Pliny respectively.¹⁵² The most unfortunate decisions certainly were made when texts not otherwise preserved (except in fragments) were reused as palimpsests. The letters and a panegyric speech of Fronto (27, 72), the orations of Symmachus (29), Cicero’s *opus maius* on the republic (35), the 91st book of Livy (75), Sallust’s *opus maius Historiae* (112, 809), the *Annals* of Granius Licinianus (167), Gargilius Martialis on agriculture (404) all are lost except for these early palimpsests. Fronto and Symmachus were suspicious to Christians as much as Cicero’s philosophical work on the republic. The historical works by Livy, Sallust and Licinianus have in common that they treat the late Roman Republican history, which was of little relevance to a

¹⁴⁹ *CLA* 1867; Bravo and Griffin (1988), 448.

¹⁵⁰ *CLA* 57, 305, 575, 1028, 1470.

¹⁵¹ *CLA* 27, 29 (= sub 335); 30; 35; 69–77; 112 (partly palimpsest, partly binding); 115; 167; 345–6; 363; 392; 404; 421; 442; 443; 445; 497–501; 725; 809 (same); 974; 1377; 1455. *CLA* 306 was partly rewritten before the 11th century.

¹⁵² Vergil: *CLA* 11, 13 (= sub 1051), 19, 99, 296; Livy: 562, 1472; Terence: 12; Pliny: 1660.

time period that assigned its beginnings to the birth of Christ. Classical books produced at a later point, on the other hand, were far less likely to be recycled: not a single one of the 15 manuscripts extant from the eighth century was deleted,¹⁵³ although one manuscript was reused as binding (1129), another as fly-leaves (1327). By contrast, none of the three oldest extant manuscripts of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* carries the title at the beginning. In one, Lucretius' name has been erased, and a different title has been substituted, apparently to protect the manuscript from deletion or destruction.¹⁵⁴ This probably explains why Lucretius' poem is extant today as the only direct testimonial of Epicurean philosophy.

Moreover, certain clusters of *membra disiecta* suggest a deliberate attempt to clear perhaps even a whole library of books with classical content. Nine classical books, including the lost 91st book of Livy's history, were deleted and reused for a single Old Testament copy (*CLA* 69) at around AD 700 in a place unknown.¹⁵⁵ The preference was obviously not in favour of more endangered texts. If the ratio of classical-pagan versus Christian or technical writings was c. 4 per cent (the ratio of manuscripts extant today), then the probability that *CLA* 69 was the product of a fortuitous selection is 0.04 by the power of 9. This figure may be blurred by the fact that pagan texts are perhaps underrepresented and may have been written in older, less readable script; however, this figure is so low that it can hardly be explained without assuming that pagan texts were deliberately selected. Four more books, of classical or similar content, were overwritten with the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon of 451 in seventh-century Bobbio.¹⁵⁶ Another cluster of four classical texts, deleted in favour of Gregory the Great's *Morals on the Book of Job*, remarkably included Euclid's *Geometry* as well as an unidentified philosophical treatise. The pagan text was deleted in early eighth-century Luxeuil.¹⁵⁷ Overall, the find has been interpreted variously as a "systematic attempt on the part of the Christians to destroy all vestiges of pagan literature" in early scholarship (not any more believed); or "one might perhaps say that

153 *CLA* 3, 10, 109, 397b, 417, 439 (the *Codex Theodosianus* overwritten with Iulius Valerius) 516, 593, 1474, 1578, 1580 (= sub 1760), 1744, 1793.

154 Butterfield (2013), 9, 141 note 12, plate V; Sorabij (1983), 351.

155 *CLA* 69: Senceca, 70: Lucan, 71: Hyginus, 72: Fronto, 73: illegible rhetorical fragment, 74: Aulus Gellius, 75: Livy, 76–7: Cicero.

156 *CLA* 27: Fronto; 28: Scholia Bobiensia in Ciceronem; 29: Symmachus, Pliny; 30: Juvenal, Persius.

157 *CLA* 498–501. Another cluster is 442–5: Cicero used as a palimpsest in Bobbio in the seventh century.

at that time the classics had become culturally obsolescent.”¹⁵⁸ Economic pressures almost certainly played a part: books became expensive as papyrus was hardly available and books were much more lavish than in ancient times. On the other hand, a copy of the Roman historian Livy in these centuries was used as a wrapping for relics.¹⁵⁹ It is therefore likely that this text was discarded because of religious reasons. The message conveyed in this case is that Christianity had overcome the errors of the pagan past. At any rate, it is clear that less care was given to rare classical than to standard Christian texts if these classical books were damaged so much that their only use was to delete and recycle them. While there was the greatest interest in Christian standard texts, there was comparatively little interest in key classical authors, such as Vergil and the early books by Livy, and no traceable interest in late Republican history and pagan philosophy. Lucretius’ poem on Epicurean philosophy (recorded in catalogues since the ninth century) probably survived only because its contents were known to very few individuals.

7.5 Conclusion

In sum, I have given here some examples to suggest that the polemical discourse of late antique authors probably influenced ecclesiastical book bans, exhortations against pagan literature by authors such as Isidore of Seville, texts on missionary activities and the selection of books in monasteries. Books with pagan content were often overwritten with Christian authors or legislation that criticised them even as they deleted them. While the creation of palimpsests can partly be explained because the original manuscripts became difficult to read, there is a number of *membra disiecta* consisting exclusively of classical originals. The *Codices Latini Antiquiores* indicate that not only the interest in the classics declined dramatically, but also that classical titles were deliberately preferred over Christian titles to be overwritten with new copies of Christian texts, perhaps because of the poor state of these classical books. Among this subgroup of classical authors there still was a clear preference for authors such as Vergil as opposed to philosophical texts. This find corresponds to the ecclesiastical legislation of that time period. Contemporary legislation required bishops to be

¹⁵⁸ Lowe (1972), 483. For early scholarship in favour of the destruction theory, Mollweide (1911), 291–2.

¹⁵⁹ CLA 57: “Used later (saec. VII–VIII) in St. John Lateran to preserve relics which came from the Holy Land”.

educated in the Bible only, but outright bans were limited to heretical works and writings in opposition to Christianity.

There is evidence for sporadic book-burning until well into the early medieval period both in the context of missionary activities and with regard to accidental finds. The legal basis for this is unclear, but it must be noted that the legislation that I have discussed in Chapter 2 was generally still in effect. Even Christian authors of the early medieval West continued to polemicize against ancient philosophy allegedly practised in some remote areas. However, it is unlikely that they were referring to actual philosophers or ancient texts. It is more likely that they used the early polemics against ancient philosophers as a label with which to denounce certain heretical or unbaptised groups, which may have transmitted some ancient philosophical traditions (as we have seen in some passages of the *Hisperica famina*). In this context, I have also proposed an alternative theory to the early text transmission of Lucretius, arguing that this text circulated amongst a group of insular pagan scholars before it arrived at the continent. We have seen that there was a strong tendency to regard as authoritative the apologetic-polemical texts and attitudes that I have discussed in previous chapters.

Conclusion

This book has sought to suggest two strands of arguments. One argument has been that the categories of forbidden or destroyed books were not always clear-cut but that there was some overlap of magical, astrological and heretical books with philosophical books, although the sources are rarely specific enough to allow firm conclusions. The other argument has been that, within the polemical discourse of Christian authors, philosophical opinions contrary to the Christian world view are often described as disturbing the unity of the Church, thus leading to heresy and causing the sin of pride, and there is also a tendency to align these opinions to magic and astrology, although this is based on a long-standing tradition.

Doctrinal concerns included questions on whether or not atoms existed as independent entities, uncreated matter, indivisible, moving automatically and by cohesion in varied order composing the objects of the material world, without divine providence. Other concerns were predictions on the movement of the stars, the singularity, duration, size and shape of the universe and whether it was a miracle of creation or something that can be explained by inherent mechanical forces that exist perpetually without divine interference; whether human beings were informed about the material world through the various senses or through the ideas of the soul; whether or not human beings are just another species of animals. The philosophical view that God does not interfere with the functioning of the world as his creation, for example, re-emerged in Europe as Deism, but not before the seventeenth century.

This book has argued that the common denominator between books on magic, astrology, divination and philosophies opposed to the Bible was their demonic origin. Pagans used magic (for example, love spells) in order to summon demons. They practised divination because they were informed of future events by consulting demons and believed in astrology under the assumption that demons controlled the stars and that their movements were therefore indicative of future events. These demons also inspired pagan philosophers with opinions contrary to the Christian world view, according to Christian authors. Epicurean hedonism, for example, was demonical because it facilitated sexual indulgence, although it is more correct to say that it explained the desire to reproduce as the driving force of evolution. Plato, by contrast, had borrowed most of his views from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and other philosophers had followed him in many respects, or so Christian authors of Late Antiquity claimed. This openness was important for the success of Christianity as Platonism became the most popular philosophical view in Late Antiquity. It is also clear that Christian

authors believed in oracles if they were divinely inspired. In fact, they argued that Christianity was true because its predictions were fulfilled. In a similar vein, Christian authors and clerics viewed the universe, the movements of the stars, planets or the moon as God's creation and therefore as something good and worthy to describe. On the other hand, the view that the universe was in perpetual motion because of inherent forces rather than divine interference was regarded as heretical in Late Antiquity, as we have seen, for example, in section 2.8 and 4.6. Epicurean natural philosophy went a step further than seventeenth-century Deism, as it excluded the divine as the first mover. This view fundamentally contradicted the biblical creation account, according to which the world came into existence through God rather than through the first clash of atoms. It also posed obvious difficulties to the belief in the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ. I have argued that Christian authors identified this view as the biblical philosophy "after the elements of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8). Epicurean philosophy should, however, not be equated with atheism as it does not preclude the existence of the divine.

It must be noted that book-burning and censorship in ancient societies were in many ways different from a modern notion of these acts where they are often associated with a totalitarian state. Taken by itself, the text of the Bible, in particular, did not include clear recommendations to dismiss any philosophies or heresies and certainly no encouragements to burn books of any kind. However, the threat to the unity of the Church, caused primarily by heretical writings, was in fact often a real one. Not only were heretical writings perceived to threaten the religious peace, but often did disputes on the right understanding of Christianity cause religious riots. It can be presumed that this was the prime motivation of the Roman state to agree on banning specific books. In this respect there have been precedents in the early imperial period where book-burning served the purpose of conflict-management. Similarly, the magic trials in Antioch show that dissident writings could threaten the imperial family in a particular crisis, and this gave sufficient cause for Roman authorities to act. Late Antiquity is generally characterised by a greater degree of state control. The public character of book-burning in the age of Justinian indicates that the authorities were interested in stopping the circulation of the material in question and to instil fear in the population. Book-burning was also associated with a powerful symbolism of averting the demonical powers that had always been linked with magical books. In some cases, people burnt the books of their past in order to demonstrate the completeness of their conversion as if they had burnt their *alter ego*. While books were often burnt in a public context in order to render the ritual of book-burning efficient, in other instances book-burning was purely a private act. I have therefore distinguished between state-censorship, explaining the dif-

ferences between ancient and modern societies in this regard, spontaneous, ritualised book-burning, burning of books in someone's own possession and intentional or unintentional destruction of books as a consequence of riots. I have also stressed that the Christian authors or clerics who advocated or encouraged censorship of books, while vying with each other for authority, were convinced that they were acting in the best interest of human beings and persuaded that what they did or wrote was to the benefit of human souls.

In the polemical discourse of Christian authors of Late Antiquity, martyrdom and sainthood could serve as reward strategies with which to encourage the disposal of books contrary to the Christian world view. Compassion and charity were additional strategies of reinforcement to bar people from reading books that could lead to damnation. Using medical metaphors, Christian polemics put these readings often on a par with mental and physical diseases and recommended book-burning as a medicine. Conjuring up sexually loaded images, Christian authors often compared forbidden pagan teaching to snakes that eject poisonous juice. Book-burning could prevent readers from burning in hell. Therefore, it was seen as compassionate and charitable to prevent neighbours from damnation by denouncing them. We have seen that inquiries into reading interests and also the lifelong spiritual monitoring of book offenders were sometimes advertised as acts of showing pity.

I have also identified a number of polemical themes that Christian authors employed to express their relationships with books and ideas and to cast doubt on a book's worthiness. In this context, laughter could be especially devastating. This is because some philosophical views were seen as ridiculous as they were inspired by demons and these demons also facilitated sexual urges which in turn caused shameful feelings particularly in individuals that attempt to abstain from indulging in these urges. This explains the magical properties that some books reportedly had in Late Antiquity. Following the example of Antony, monks and clerics often fought against demons that appeared to them in the shape of sexual urges and poisonous animals, such as spiders and snakes. Christian authors therefore argued that heretical-philosophical views were like spider-webs snaring the unwary. It can be argued that persistent sexual urges, if consistently unfulfilled, can be detrimental to the mental well-being. To my mind, the demonic contents of some books were therefore viewed as triggering mental diseases, especially since the demons were keen to prevent people from receiving salvation. While these demons were contagious, according to Augustine, fire had the property to destroy these demons and purify the space that was contaminated by demons. Burning of books, especially of magic books, is often linked to the burning of bodies because it could prevent bodies from burning in purgatory, but it must be noted that the message of the gospel itself was

normally seen as a sufficient cure. Book-burning was therefore regarded as beneficial to the greater community.

Moreover, medical metaphors have clearly entered imperial legislation. Given the amount of reports on miracle-healing and exorcisms performed on pagans, these metaphors had a real-life application. In this context it is worth noting that Christian authors describe philosophy as an ill body that is dying naturally. I suggest that the body-metaphor includes a polemical attack against materialist philosophies because these supported the preference of the body to the soul.

Using these strategies, educated Christian authors from the upper strata appealed to Christians such as monks, ascetics, holy men, certain medical practitioners and exorcists (which often were less educated). Their attitudes have probably not appealed as much to the majority of the population. The polemical discourse of Christian authors therefore opens a window into the ascetic-monastic milieu and may well be seen as somewhat representative for these circles. Monks, ascetics and holy men could burn books as part of a spectacle in order to destroy the demons by which they felt persecuted. Although evidence for this is somewhat regionally limited, in the hagiographical imagination, they searched houses to find forbidden books. Monastic institutions also came to be in charge of text transmission and the preservation of books.

With regard to imperial censorship legislation, I have stressed the many practical difficulties that prevented any systematic enforcement of these laws. There is particularly little evidence for state authorities enforcing censorship or book-burning laws outwith of a few spectacular incidents. On the other hand, there is probably more evidence of clerical enforcement or incidents of book-burning by what I have called zealous Christians, who were sometimes supported by state authorities, particularly by the *defensores*, as we have seen in Chapter 3. As with other religious laws, imperial legislation gave a legal framework with which to acknowledge the tendencies of that time rather than a directive that was seriously thought to be put into effect throughout the empire. Given the practical difficulties of locating copies of a banned book, denunciation, compounded by personal motives, was the most feasible way to identify prohibited books.

The question of whether or not book-burning affected the transmission of pagan texts remains difficult to answer. It is likely that books that were primarily targeted (magic books, astrological books, pagan ritual books, specific philosophical attacks against Christianity) were effectively barred from circulation as a direct or indirect consequence of book searches; however, magic and astrology were not completely suppressed but continued to play some role among Christians in the centuries to follow. Some philosophical attacks against Christi-

anity survive in refutations. It is not unlikely that some philosophical texts that were disagreeing with the Christian world view – or Christian texts that preserved deviant philosophical traditions – were occasionally destroyed. This is best evidenced under the emperors Valens and Justinian, which some sources indicate had a significant impact on the circulation of these texts if taken at face value, but their rhetorical tendencies and lack of details as to actual titles do not allow firm conclusions. At any rate, over time incidents like these easily accounted for a reduced interest in preserving texts that came under sustained suspicion.

Copying and circulation of non-Christian texts slowed down dramatically at the end of Antiquity, especially in the successor states, but the main contributing factors can be identified as economic decline and loss of interest, largely due to the fact that earthly success and social status no longer depended on familiarity with non-Christian texts, as we have seen in Chapter 5. On the other hand, other factors such as fearsome examples made when books were burned, censorship, control of book-production and imperial and clerical efforts to stamp out forbidden texts, may well have contributed to the overall loss of interest in preserving non-Christian texts. Polemical attacks against rival philosophical or religious groups have been around since Antiquity, but it is not known that this caused the elimination of any literary genre or tradition. On the other hand, the diversity of different religious or philosophical groups in Antiquity ensured the survival of different religious or philosophical traditions. With Christianity becoming the state religion, this may well have changed, especially since there are examples known of groups keen to preserve only their own related texts and suppressing others (such as different Christian groups or Plato and Democritus).

Concerning philosophical views contrary to the Christian world view, it is not clear how many of these views continued to circulate in writing. There is some evidence for Epicurean texts circulating in the fourth centuries and texts belonging to other philosophical schools (but not to Platonism or Aristotelianism) beyond that. At first glance, it is not impossible to think that the polemical passages of Christian authors of Late Antiquity concerning these philosophies were simply based on similar passages from earlier Christian authors who flourished while these philosophies were still a living tradition. However, as I have shown, for example, in Chapter 4, these philosophical views, as well as their reception by dissident Christian authors, were still felt to be a threat to the unity of the Church in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Besides the possibility that there were books preserving these philosophical opinions (for example, handbooks or scholarly notebooks), it can also be assumed that these ideas continued to circulate as part of an oral tradition. This is not to say that Epicureanism or other philosophical schools except for Neoplatonism were very present or robust

in the late fourth or early fifth century, but they were not forgotten either. It is therefore pertinent that Epicurean traditions are attested for the late fifth century and beyond, not only as polemical labels, but as actually linked to the view that the universe consisted of mechanical movements, as I have argued in chapters 2–4. Christian polemical discourse suggests that certain philosophical traditions were seen as the mother of all heresy in the world. I am aware of the argument that Christian authors may have used the charge of Epicureanism to discredit heretical opinions such as those put forward by the Manichaeans, but primary sources show that the Manichaeans did indeed share these beliefs. I therefore suggest that their affinity to materialist philosophy was a polemical strategy with which to justify the burning of heretical and astrological books.

If a wide definition of censorship is accepted, which involves the active refusal to copy certain texts because current (religious) authorities effectively prohibited this, then the polemical discourse of Christian authors, along with imperial and ecclesiastical bans on literature described with similar terminology, can practically be understood as censorship. The combination of these two factors, polemical discourse (which in itself may as well be taken as literary criticism) and bans of literature and perhaps even the fact that the terminology used in contexts of book-burning was similar to that found in polemics and legislation, was more detrimental to the transmission of affected texts than each factor on its own. This may sufficiently explain why theological, philosophical or scientific approaches that positively engaged with old materialist traditions (other than with the explicit aim of refuting these) remained absent particularly from the Western literary tradition for centuries to come. The re-emergence of these theories which were initiated by the Islamic transmission of texts, the rediscovery of ancient texts and the invention of the printing press gave rise to spectacular religious trials and book bans in the late medieval and modern periods.



Figure 3. 'Oven of scorn' (*Salzburger Spottofen*), eighteenth century, Museum Carolino-Augustum, Salzburg. The book-shelf displays non-conformist works from antiquity to the early modern age. The banner reads 'library dedicated to Vulcan' (*bibliotheca Vulcano consecrata*).
© Salzburg Museum

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